EDDIE VEDDER BEYOND PEARL JAM

PINK FLOYD ECHOES THEN AND NOW...

MOJO

The Music Magazine

173 REVIEWS HURRAY FOR THE RIFF RAFF, BIG THIEF SIMPLE MINDS BROADCAST & MORE

IGGY! LOU! BOWIE! THE GLAM ART OF MICK ROCK

AL GREEN SOUL AND SELF-DISCOVERY

VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR HERETICS OF PROG

ANAÏS MITCHELL ESCAPE FROM HADESTOWN

THE BEATLES INSIDE THE MAL EVANS ARCHIVE

ROBBIE SHAKESPEARE R.I.P.

ANARCHY! SUBVERSION! GENIUS!

THE MONKEES

+ MICHAEL NESMITH BY MICKY DOLENZ

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JOSEPHINE FOSTER
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WHAT CAN I SAY? NO REGRETS... OUT OF THE GREY + LIVE, DEMOS & OUTTAKES
FIRE RECORDS 3CD BOOKBACK
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WE FALL APART
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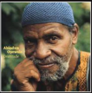
From the pounding tuneful fuzz of lead single 'Going to Amsterdam' to the atmospheric heart-string puller 'The Lights', The volunteered's debut is a Sparklehorse, GBV, Built To Spill, Buddy Holly-inspired tunefest.



ABIODUN OYEWOLE
GRATITUDE
AFAR LP / CD
First solo album from The Last Poets co-founder since 1995. For fans of Curtis Mayfield, Bob Dylan and James Baldwin. "One of the most influential spoken-word groups that pioneered hip-hop" NPR

JAKE XERXES FUSSELL
GOOD AND GREEN AGAIN
PARADISE OF BACHELORS LP / CD
Fussell's fourth album finds the acclaimed folksong interpreter, guitarist, and singer navigating fresh sonic and compositional landscapes on the most conceptually focused, breathtakingly rendered, and enigmatically poignant record to date.

LADY WRAY
PIECE OF ME
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Boom-bap drums & chunky bass lines are front-and-center on Lady Wray's sophomore album, creating a perfect head-nodding backdrop to take on the good, the bad, the difficult, & the joyful on her most personal collection of songs to date.

GARCIA PEOPLES
DODGING DUES
NO QUARTER LP / CD
A startlingly expansive record traversing many moods and styles: languid and dreamy one moment, surging and intense the next. Traces of Thin Lizzy, U.K. folk-prog, and vintage Meat Puppets.

JANA HORN
OPTIMISM
NO QUARTER LP / CD
Debut album from Austin, Texas songwriter. "Deceptively gentle songs of honesty, sensuality and longing" - Mojo / 4 stars.

THE KERNAL
LISTEN TO THE BLOOD
SINGLE LOCK RECORDS LP / CD
"In his music - which he laughingly describes as 'diet country' - The Kernal delves into everything from family dysfunction to road trips to matters of the heart, with a storyteller's eye and a sly sense of humour".

THE REDS, PINKS AND PURPLES
SUMMER AT LAND'S END
TOUGH LOVE LP / CD
Summer at Land's End combines Glenn Donaldson's rueful pop sensibility with a parallel musical universe, one composed of pictures, dreams, and feelings without words.

SPRINGTIME
SPRINGTIME
JOYFUL NOISE RECORDING LP / CD
A balm to modern-day hysteria exists, and its name is Springtime (members of Tropical Fuck Storm, Dirty Three, The Necks). Combining free jazz, poeticism, and improvisation, Springtime soothes a shell-shocked world.

YEULE
GLITCH PRINCESS
BAYONET LP / CD
Open a channel to the in-between spaces: error messages mix with the jagged edges of feedback loops. Shoegaze meets ethereal, melodic dance beats to guide users through the fever dream.
"breathtakingly beautiful" i-D

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COLD AS WEISS
COLEMINE RECORDS LP / CD
The third LP from the world's premier funky organ trio featuring their new and permanent drummer Dan Weiss.

SANDY'S
MAGIC MIND
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> "The only reason I got such great pictures was that I was in love with the subject."

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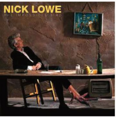

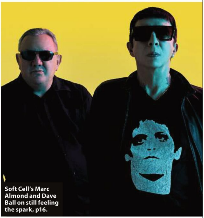

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE...

Andrew Cotterill
Andy has shot for MOJO since 2000, including an Arctic Monkeys cover complete with Floydian light show. This month he returns to Floyd territory, with candid rehearsal pics of Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets. Currently working with artists Sarah Brown and Carmody.

Bob Mehr
MOJO's Memphis music maven Mehr has shared more than a few memorable conversations with Al Green over the years. On its 50th anniversary, he takes a look back at one of Green's defining moments, *Let's Stay Together*, tracing how the singer, producer Willie Mitchell and Hi Rhythm made their masterpiece.

Keith Cameron
MOJO's Contributing Editor still hasn't recovered from Pearl Jam's 2013 Wrigley Field gig, when the band played 'til 2am after a thunderstorm delay. Keith's interview with Eddie Vedder is on p26. An updated edition of his book Mudhoney: The Sound & The Fury From Seattle is published by Omnibus Press on March 24.

Andrew Whitton

Cat Power returns with 'Covers', Chan Marshall's third album of her celebrated reinterpretations of songs by classic and contemporary artists including Frank Ocean, The Pogues & Lana Del Ray

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ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING…

Lucy Dacus

HOME VIDEO STAR

What music are you currently grooving to?

I've really been loving **Dijon**'s latest record, *Absolutely*. The songwriting is really heartfelt and clever, and the fidelity goes from low to high throughout the album, which is one of the coolest tricks.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

I used to say **Bowie**'s *Ziggy Stardust*, but the record I listen to the most is *Dragging A Dead Deer Up A Hill* by **Grouper**. It resets me. It's not a very lyrical album, but sometimes I just need music to wash over me.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

If we're talking vinyl, I bought *Pearl* by **Janis Joplin**, *Aladdin Sane* by Bowie and **The Animals**' *The Best Of*, from Deep Groove in Richmond, VA. But when I was 10, I bought a CD of **Green Day**'s *American Idiot* but my dad threw it away because of the cursing.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Bruce Springsteen or **Prince**. They really set the standards for what a musician can be.

What do you sing in the shower?

I usually write songs in the shower, or I sing my roommates' songs, as they're songwriters too.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

LCD Soundsystem's whole discography and *Black Messiah* by **D'Angelo**. These albums are full of hype, you feel like you have to dance.

And your Sunday morning record?

I've been listening to a really moving album called *The Tide's Magnificence* by **Molly Drake**, Nick Drake's mother. I also enjoy playing *Blossom Dearie Sings*, there's a song Sunday Afternoon which I love to play on a Sunday. I feel like I'm in a movie.

Lucy tours the UK in March.

Richard Jobson

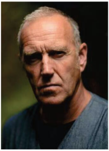
CHIEF SKID, FILMMAKER, WRITER

What are you currently grooving to?

Stuff from parts of my own life that I didn't really connect with at the time – mad stuff like **Einstürzende Neubauten**. And one of *the* most seminal bands from Manchester, **Magazine** – [1978 debut] *Real Life* actually was a game-changer. Also **The Clockworks**, a band from Ireland I like a lot.

Your favourite record of all time?

Berlin by **Lou Reed**. It had everything for me. It's a violent, romantic album, and it has a terrible end, of course, with a suicide. I guess, with what happened to me in Berlin [where Jobson's partner took her own life in the early '80s], maybe that's why it means even more to me now. I play it every week.



Ebru Yildiz

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

The Sensational Alex Harvey Band's *Next* from Sandy Muir's Record Shop in Dunfermline, with money I earned from picking potatoes.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Like any teenage boy caught in the world of hating where he came from and feeling alienated, **David Bowie**. He created a fantasy journey, which became his reality. He means so much to me. After *Hunky Dory*, I never left.

What do you sing in the shower?

I end up singing songs that I hate. I've been using shower-time to learn songs, and yesterday I had a go at I Wanna Be Your Dog, and it morphs into something by fucking **Atomic Kitten** or the fucking **Boomtown Rats**.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Something with an elegance and beauty about it. I love how a **Mogwai** track has a tender, achingly beautiful beginning and then becomes this fucking crescendo that bashes your ears to shit.

And your Sunday morning record?

I learned this from Steve Severin when we shared a flat – start with **Brian Eno**'s *Music For Airports*, and your day just gets better. And **Max Richter**'s a mainstay in my life.

Skids' Songs From A Haunted Ballroom is out now on Cleopatra.

Kathy Sledge

STILL LOST IN MUSIC

What music are you currently grooving to?

I'm loving Afrobeat right now – **WizKid**'s Essence really drives me to want to sing some Afrobeat music. And, of course, I love the classic disco, and **Bruno Mars**.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Hard, right? **Earth, Wind & Fire**, *That's The Way Of The World* – amazing performers and an incredible message. And also **Stevie Wonder**, *Music Of My Mind*. He's a genius! My mom and sisters and my older sister Carol would always play it when I was a kid.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

It was *Music Of My Mind*, at the local record store in my neighbourhood in west Philly.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Tina Turner. I feel like there are parallels, she grew up on-stage, she's a powerhouse, the adversities she's had – people know I was sued by my sisters, but I'd like to make it clear that I would never sue anyone… at the end of the day, you come out stronger and you know your gift more than ever.

What do you sing in the shower?

Them There Eyes by **Billie Holiday**. I know she had a heavy life, but she was so sexy and witty. I love jazz – I'm working on a jazz project with Stanley Clarke.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

It used to be me out there on-stage, but now it's become chill night, I guess. I love Brazilian music so when I'm relaxing I'll play **Bebel Gilberto**'s *Tanto Tempo*. My sister Joni used to say she's the sexiest artist ever.

And your Sunday morning record?

Hands down, it's got to be some gospel. When I want to meditate and pray and feel good, I'll play **Marvin Sapp**'s Never Would've Made It. It has a sense of healing to it.

Sister Sledge ft. Kathy Sledge play Indigo at The O2, London, on May 14.

> "Start your day with *Music For Airports* and your day just gets better."
> RICHARD JOBSON

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Theories, rants, etc.

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THE TALE OF THE MONKEES, AND MIKE Nesmith's role in the band, has often been framed as a battle for authenticity; a great American songwriter struggling to articulate himself in the face of pre-fabricated commercial expediencies. This month, though, as we mourn Nesmith, who died at the end of 2021, and celebrate all aspects of his incredible legacy, it feels like we've reached a much more sophisticated place. David Fricke's tremendous cover story doesn't ignore Nesmith's artistic frustrations. But it also grasps that The Monkees were a great American band: fed a diet of imperishable songs; blessed with a chemistry that transcended studio machinations, even as the quartet never fully understood how that chemistry worked. "Do me the gracious favour of not pointing me out as the most talented Monkee," Nesmith said humbly, in 1974. "David and Peter and Micky were very heavy cats." For those of us who grew up on The Monkees, then discovered the riches of Nez's solo career, the latter never diminished the former. We listened to, and loved, the band.

You'll have noticed that there's no CD included with this copy of MOJO. Don't worry: it hasn't got lost in transit. The truth is, the cost of producing our CDs has radically increased over the past year, to the degree that we've had to make a very tough decision and drop the CD from our package this month. Thanks, as ever, for your loyalty and support through these tricky times – and rest assured, we'll be back to normal for MOJO 341. In the meantime, you can find a soundtrack to this issue on Spotify if you search for #TheMOJOPlaylist.

John

JOHN MULVEY, EDITOR

He looks like a nice guy and I like his smile

I listened to the 'Four Runes' album as I read your in-depth Led Zeppelin cover feature [MOJO 337]. I've been a Zep fan since the mid '70s, introduced to many great bands by my older sister. I saw Zep at Knebworth on August 4, 1979 and have seen Robert Plant as a solo artist a few times over the intervening years. I met Jimmy Page at Tower Records in Piccadilly Circus and John Paul Jones at a Julie Felix in-store gig. I blagged my way into Percy's Somerset House afterparty a few years ago but, just as he was coming downstairs from his dressing room, security felt my collar – I almost got the third signature on my original Knebworth programme. Close but no cigar; chucked out into the July evening rain.

Last Wednesday, while browsing in Rough Trade East, I bumped into the erstwhile rock god doing his Christmas shopping. During a brief chat, Plant said the Knebworth show on August 4, 1979 was better than August 11, but both were shit. I was 16 and it was one of my favourite gigs of all time and well worth sleeping rough for. I congratulated him on his new collaboration with Alison Krauss and he said he is immensely proud of their latest record.

They say never meet your heroes and that was probably true for Jimmy Page, but JPJ and Planty were real gentlemen and generous with their time.

Bruce Marsh, Newbury Park

I've got to have a boost or something

To the casual observer, Status Quo always swung on the Rossi/Parfitt axis, but for many of us in the Quo Army during the '70s, powerhouse bass player/vocalist Alan Lancaster was very much the "Third Musketeer". Your tribute following his sad passing [MOJO 337] invites a deeper appraisal of

his influence. Criticism of Status Quo's sometimes formulaic musical signature, and their penchant for lightweight singles, is well-documented, but Alan Lancaster gave the band an extra, tougher dimension on their classic-era albums. For example *Quo*, from 1974, is arguably the heaviest, hardest-rocking and most diverse work they ever produced. Not only did Alan co-write six of the eight songs, but four of them featured his lead vocal. For many, *Quo* is the band's magnum opus, and it's Alan Lancaster's finest hour.

I was at the opening gig on the Frantic Four Reunion tour in 2013; the first time they had played together in 30 years. Alan's health wasn't great, even then, and I wondered if he could pull it off. He sang lead on the first four songs of the set, and anything less than his trademark robust delivery would have been an unbearable disaster. He absolutely nailed it, bless him. RIP "Nuff".

Brian Ritson, via e-mail

It's a movie for kids, they're not gonna dig it, man!

Thank you for the excellent articles on the new Let It Be films and music [MOJO 336]. Yes; loved the Peter Jackson films and the incredible new mixes, but I do have some problems with the Jackson films. One of the most striking aspects was how George was really not given the attention by John and Paul – as they admit during their secretly taped conversation in the cafeteria. So what on earth led Peter Jackson to delete the complete performance of George's For You Blue and the studio performances of Let It Be, Two Of Us and The Long And Winding Road? All on the 1970 version. Bit like doing an extended version of Magical Mystery Tour and leaving out I Am The Walrus.

Martin Valins, Lancaster, PA

I been lookin' all over for you creeps, where ya been?

I must congratulate you on your 1971 Nuggets feature in MOJO 339. Thanks to this article, I have now discovered the joys of Emitt Rhodes and Heads Hands & Feet, and look forward to checking out the other selected nuggets your writers have highlighted. I'm particularly taken by the superb Song For Suzie (and its incredible guitar solo), which investigation has shown did not actually originate in the UK on Heads Hands & Feet's eponymous 1971 album. Instead, it was initially released as a track on Island Records' *El Pea* Various Artists sampler (which itself is worthy of further exploration). In the USA, *Heads Hands & Feet* was issued as a double album and included Song For Suzie among its extra tracks. The expanded USA tracklisting was later adopted for CD versions of the album.

Indeed, I would be delighted if you made Nuggets a regular feature, whereby you focus on a specific year in a given issue and identify lesser-known long-player gems from that year.

Gary, via e-mail

…Great to read the feature on albums released in golden 1971 including some great forgotten gems, especially Heads Hands & Feet's debut set of homegrown country-rock; Jack Bruce's progressive rock'n'jazz album, *Harmony Row*; and Eugene McDaniels' *Headless Heroes Of The Apocalypse*. I first heard the latter on Mike Raven's Radio 1 R&B Show, with Raven explaining that this off-the-wall platter of hardcore soul/funk/jazz was by none other than early-1960s R&B/pop chart-topper Gene McDaniels. It blew me away!

MOJO could have included such crate-digger treasures as Help Yourself's debut set of psychedelic country-rock on Liberty – another album first heard on the radio played by John Peel; Gene Clark's magnificent *White Light* album, which made a detour around the Hot 100 but earned Gene immortality; and Rory Gallagher's eponymous debut solo album for Polydor, which only just made it into the Top 100 official charts despite containing Rory's show-stoppers Sinner Boy, Laundromat and I Fall Apart.

Tony Burke, Bedford

…Fab choices, but where is Judee Sill's debut album? Some folk classify it as baroque folk. I just file it under brilliant.

Edward R, via e-mail

He'll never make it through this intense bombardment. Nobody could.

I would probably concur that 1971 was the best year for music, and it was good to see Flamin' Groovies getting a nod in 1971 Nuggets. However, it is perhaps indicative of their lead singer's solo work overshadowing their own that the perennially underrated Faces were omitted from the article – and this despite the release of two classy LPs in the year in question. Both records include fine examples of the Faces' exquisite balladry and ballsy belters, topped off (on *Long Player*) with a barnstorming live, definitive version of one of the best solo Beatles songs.

Richard Nash, via e-mail

Wait 'til I get through telling them how we do it

Thanks for including in Nuggets 1971 two albums that I produced for my Village Thing label, Dave Evans' *The Words In Between* and Steve Tilston's *An Acoustic Confusion* – and also two of Sandy Roberton's productions, Shelagh McDonald's *Stargazer* and Keith Christmas's *Pigmy*. At the time, all four of those artists were resident performers at the mildly legendary Bristol Troubadour. Not a bad achievement for one small West Country folk club!

Ian A Anderson, Cambridge

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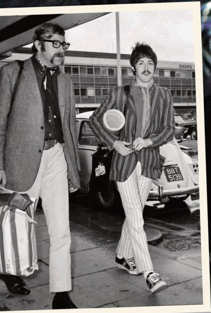
WHAT GOES ON!

THE HOT NEWS AND BIZARRE STORIES FROM PLANET **MOJO**

With a little help from their friend (below, from left): Mal with McCartney, Heathrow, April 12, 1967; playing Instant Karma on Top Of The Pops with the Plastic Ono Band, February 12, 1970 (from left) Lennon, Yoko, Mal, BP Fallon; Mal with Ringo in 1964.



Everybody Digs Mal Evans

Rediscovered! The Beatles roadie/minder/PA's long-lost memoir and vault of memorabilia.

AS THE quiet star of the Get Back documentary series, interest in Beatles roadie-turned-personal assistant Mal Evans has never been greater. Nicknamed Big Mal or the Gentle Giant, Evans was the Liverpudlian former telephone engineer whose life was changed when he wandered into the Cavern club one lunchtime in 1962 and witnessed The Beatles performing. The next year he was employed by the band as a gofer and tech, devotedly working with them on the road and in the studio until their break-up.

Now, the late Evans' long-hidden archive of diaries, photographs and illustrations – along with the manuscript of his never-published memoir Living The Beatles' Legend: 200 Miles To Go – has been handed over by his estate to US author Kenneth Womack. The result will be two forthcoming books: the first (due 2023) an in-depth biography of Evans, with a visual compendium coming the following year.

"Mal's story desperately needs to be told in a full and correct fashion," Womack tells MOJO. "But also, there is so much material that we want to make sure it's very carefully curated. John Lennon famously wrote to Mal when Mal told him he was working on a book. John said, 'Good, I can finally find out what's in all of those diary entries. Maybe it's just "Moved amp today".' I'm happy to say they're much more detailed than that."

In Get Back, Evans' devotion to The Beatles is very much in evidence – quickly acquiring (and then happily banging) an anvil as they run through Maxwell's Silver Hammer, or reassuring George Harrison, after he walks out on the Twickenham sessions, that he'll make sure the guitarist gets his future residual payments. "One of the beautiful things about Mal is the fact that he was so dedicated and loyal to them," Womack stresses. "He didn't only love them as people, he was a fan. Mal had a box seat to watch the greatest music of the 20th century develop into these amazing recordings."

After The Beatles' split, Evans continued to help manage the members' solo projects,

Getty, Wenn, Alamy

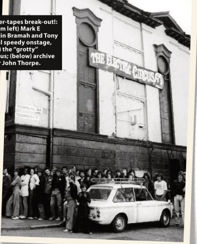
and himself became a record producer, most notably of Badfinger's 1970 hit No Matter What. But he was to meet a sorry end, shot dead by police in Los Angeles in 1976 after wielding an air rifle while in a confused state. Yet Womack argues it's too easy to simply view Evans as being a lost soul after the demise of the Fabs.

"I think that like many situations," he reasons, "the factors are far more complex than one simple answer. And I think it'll be fascinating for people to see how these elements come together."

For many years, Mal Evans' archive was believed to have been lost by the LAPD, before turning up in the basement of his New York publisher and being returned to his family. Womack teasingly reveals that the story is even more tangled. "It's fascinating how this material moves about for a while," he says. "It's got a great mystery to it. And that's what's exciting."

Tom Doyle

"Mal had a box seat to watch the greatest music of the 20th century."
KENNETH WOMACK



Bingo master-tapes break-out!: The Fall (from left) Mark E Smith, Martin Bramah and Tony Friel get real speedy onstage, 1977; (right) the "grotty" Electric Circus; (below) archive campaigner John Thorpe.

THE LOST TAPES OF MANC-PUNK NEXUS THE ELECTRIC CIRCUS, FOUND AT LAST?

NORTHERN PUNK crucible the Electric Circus, a grotty venue in Manchester's Collyhurst, lasted a year but saw performances from the Sex Pistols, The Damned, The Clash, Ramones, The Jam, Banshees and every major act of the day. The best-known audio document of it remains the 1978 eight-track 10-inch *Short Circuit – Live At The Electric Circus*, recorded during the venue's last weekend before it closed on October 2, 1977. With Joy Division (still known as Warsaw), Buzzcocks, The Fall, John Cooper Clarke, Steel Pulse and The Drones recorded on Virgin's multitrack mobile studio, the high-quality recordings were thrilling, if few in number.

So what happened to the tapes of the groups' complete performances? And what of Magazine, The Negatives and others who appeared at the venue's last hurrah? The online Electric Circus Archive Release Campaign, orchestrated by Stoke Newington music fan John Thorpe, wanted to know, and dreamed of an expanded re-release. Sadly, John passed away in November.

"He just knew that there were tapes in the archive," says his son Sean, who cites the 2008 release of Buzzcocks' October 2 show as proof that recordings do exist. "His favourite band was The Fall, so anything by them was gold dust to him, and he knew [a release] would be a fan's dream, because a lot of people want to listen to the Joy Division/Warsaw one, to hear that holy grail concert."

Father and son began work at the end of 2020, tracking down band members, technical personnel and ex-label connections via record sleeve credits and music biographies to find out where tapes might be. "He had blueprints Sellotaped all over the walls, and notes everywhere," says Sean. "After a while talking to people, dad got some trust out of them, and it got to full-on information sharing. We sort of collaborated with people – someone else on Facebook helped my dad a lot too. Every time he found more information, he'd let out a big cheer."

With some Virgin Records multi-track tapes now held in the Universal vaults, and others existing as monitor tapes, so far the campaign has unearthed such Electric Circus-recorded gems as the full version of Joy Division's Novelty, complete sets by The Prefects and John Cooper Clarke, Magazine's debut performance and more Buzzcocks. The Fall's set has been declared found, but, as Sean says, "We can't say we've officially 'got' them – The Fall's still in the vaults."

"We've had people saying it's all fake..."
SEAN THORPE

For punk fans, it seems almost too good to be true. "Yeah, we've had people saying it's all fake, even [Fall guitarist] Martin Bramah," says Sean. "I had a long discussion with him, and he sort of said that he believes us. He's just not interested in any of it."

Sean is keen for any interested record companies to get in touch to help prepare the material for licensed release. He intends to complete the work instigated by John, who wrote the book Masculism in 2016 and recorded numerous albums including *I For An I* (2018) and *Destination Zero* (2019). "We'll get this done, not just for my dad, but all the fans that have helped us," he says. "My dad always made it very clear, he wanted the money and the credit to go to the artists. He just wanted the satisfaction of it being released."

Ian Harrison

Go to facebook.com/ecircus1977

GIMME FIVE... CHICKEN SOUNDS

Jack DeJohnette's Directions
Cosmic Chicken
(PRESTIGE, 1975)

A buried fusion gem where the Coltrane-Miles-ECM percussionist swings as his band get wild and free. Apart from the woozy title track, it's hard to glean where chickens come into it, though Eiderdown suggests ducks.

Ronnie Spector
Tandoori Chicken
(APPLE B-SIDE, 1971)

This rollicking George Harrison/Phil Spector oddity – which namechecks Mal Evans (see previous pages) – was cut in one take and makes a meal of the marinated dish "and a great big bottle of wine" sound like the ultimate feast.

Thee Michelle Gun Elephant
Chicken Zombies
(TRIAD, 1997)

A hit in Japan for the Tokyo garage rockers: the *Odds & Sods*-like LP sleeve finds them in American football helmets spelling out 'F-U-C-K'. Songs called The Birdmen and Romantic (Broiler Dinner Version) keep things fowl.

Dr. Alimantado
Best Dressed Chicken In Town
(GREENSLEEVES, 1978)

The tip of the iceberg for chicken-themed reggae: see also Santa Ranking's *Ruff Neck Chicken* (also with American football players on the sleeve!), Lee Van Cliff's Sexy Chicken and Music Doctor's Ghost Chicken.

Chicken Shack
100 Ton Chicken
(BLUE HORIZON, 1969)

Stan Webb's Brit bluesers get heavier and bongo-happy on their third album. The sleeve has Stan dressed as a jester and the band as a monk and some cavaliers, who, in the gatefold, are apparently killed by a deadly chicken. Thought-provoking.

Kevin Cummins/Getty Images

THE ROLLING STONES

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'Pol position: (below, from left) Daniel Kessler, Paul Banks and Sam Fogarino in Battery Studios, London; (right) Kessler and producer Flood up the energy levels.

INTERPOL TURN TO THE LIGHT ON LP SEVEN. PLUS, PROG?

AFTER SIX LPs, it's well-established that lightening the mood isn't one of Interpol's core values. That might change with the follow-up to 2018's elegant *Marauder*. "I'm a pretty doom-and-gloom kind of vocalist," says frontman Paul Banks, "and that's not what came out of me this time."

The band's seventh album started to take shape shortly after Banks's side-project Muzz released their album in June 2020. Guitarist Daniel Kessler began sending songs through to Banks and drummer Sam Fogarino, the singer "writing vocals sitting in a comfy chair next to the window in Edinburgh," his billet for the first lockdown. Mindful of the neighbours, he kept his voice down, but remote working led to the different spaces he was seeking. "I think my voice does different things at quieter volumes," he says. "I think I perceive and write melodies differently."

Even so, they have managed to include a "slinky, sleazy, not proggy but it's… pretty fucking proggy" track called Into The Night, which takes "a Led Zeppelin approach, a lot of influence from Bonham. There's a chord progression that Daniel did that's got a very fucked-up time signature so everybody has to find their way with their instrument into it." A couple of songs feature piano (Banks has "been spending time with Beethoven" over lockdown), the band integrating it with "distorted bass and guitar". "I think it's an interesting alchemy," he says.

When the band reunited, it was in a house in the Catskills – an escape-to-the-country trick learned when working on *Marauder* with Dave Fridmann. "It was great – going to the supermarket, hanging in the yard." Long-distance ideas coalesced: "it feels quite anthemic at moments, which I think is a curious effect considering the ideas were initially delivered in a more quiet, pulled-in way."

Next stop was north London's Battery Studios to work with producers Flood and Alan Moulder. "We've worked with Moulder a few times and I think that's a great fit for us," says Banks. "He's super-talented."

Flood's work with Nick Cave, meanwhile, was just part of his allure. "Whatever concept one might have of a genius producer, he's all that and a bag of chips," says Banks. "He hears when the computer has to reboot! He can hear that the computer is not playing the song back the same way as it was 20 minutes before [and] how the electricity changes according to the equipment you're using."

The energy running through the new LP was equally surprising. There are "moments where the record does not lean towards melancholy in the way we traditionally may lean towards melancholy," says Banks. "I think we may have instinctively leaned a little more towards beauty and reassurance and life, in a time of so much confusion and struggle and disheartening reality."

Victoria Segal

FACT SHEET

Title: TBC

Date: summer 2022

Production: Flood and Alan Moulder

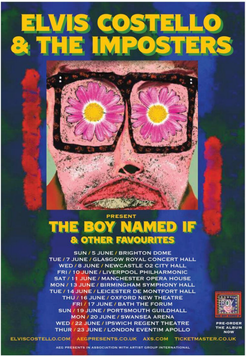
Songs: Into The Night / Juror / Greenwich

The Buzz: "It's warm and very, very realised. Anthemic without being loud, at least from the vocal standpoint. I think there are some gentle and very pretty moments that happen."
Paul Banks

ALSO WORKING

…the debut LP by **WET LEG** (right) arrives in April, with production by **Dan Carey**. "We want to be goofy and a little bit rude," says singer **Rhian Teasdale**. "We want people to have a good time, even if that might not be possible all of the time"… **NEIL YOUNG** is already planning another album… announcing a European tour for 2022, **THE CURE** stated, 'NEW 67' ALBUM = NEW 135' SHOW,' suggesting a new record is also ready… **BLACK COUNTRY, NEW ROAD** are having thoughts about their third album. "We've started writing some stuff," says sax player **Lewis Evans**, "musical ideas, just little things." Bassist **Tyler Hyde** adds, "This is where the next album comes about, just by us messing about and not having a plan"… **DR DRE** revealed that he has completed recording *Casablanco*, a new album with fellow LFC fan and ex-Floetry singer **Marsha Ambrosius**. "I had a blast!!" said Dre. "This is some of my best work!!"… there's a new **DREAM SYNDICATE** album coming in June. Stephen McCarthy of **The Long Ryders** guests and **John Agnello** produces… *For The Sake Of Bethel Woods*, **MIDLAKE**'s first record since 2013's *Antiphon*, arrives in March. It was produced by **John Congleton**: "I can't say enough just how much his influence brought our music to another sonic place," says singer/guitarist **Eric Pulido**… **TAJ MAHAL** (left) told the Cedar Rapids Gazette that he'll release an album with **Ry Cooder** in 2022. "I relate to Ry," he says. "Working with him comes easily…"

Getty, Hollie Fernando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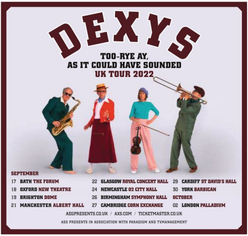
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The purple gang: having waved goodbye, Soft Cell's Marc Almond and Dave Ball say hello (again).

Andrew Whitton

SOFT CELL

The original UK synth duo discuss comebacks, anxiety and angst, and how notoriety lasts.

EMERGING FROM Leeds Poly and the same northern garage-electronics scene that gave us The Human League and Cabaret Voltaire, Soft Cell – AKA Marc Almond (voice) and Dave Ball (sounds) – combined sleaze, glamour and emotion on an early-'80s spree of gleaming hits. Worldwide fame was theirs with 1981's Tainted Love, but they were too inflammable to last, and split in 1984 after four albums. While Ball continues to work with The Grid and beyond, and Almond's solo LP tally is 25 and rising, the two have now reunited for new Soft Cell album *Happiness Not Included*, where sparse machine melodies and an undiminished voice in the spotlight communicate despair, tenderness and maturity. "Soft Cell has always been a bit of an electronic rock and roll band, really," says Marc.

Wasn't your show at the O2 Arena in September 2018 meant to be Soft Cell's final farewell?

Dave Ball: I've always defended myself on this. I said to Marc, "Don't say it's the last show, just say it's a celebration because it's an anniversary." Sometimes you don't need to draw a line under everything.

Marc Almond: I look at everything I do, now, as being the last thing. I'm 65 next year, it *might* be the last thing I ever do! It was: if the O2's a total disaster, it will show me that we must never do it again, or if it's a massive success, it'll be a great way to kind of end it. I was shocked that it was 16,000 people… I thought people would go, "You said it was the last gig, I want my money back", blah blah, but they were really happy we were back doing something.

Did returning to make new Soft Cell music feel daunting?

MA: Whenever I do anything with Soft Cell, I'm always full of anxiety and angst. But I thought, "It would be kind of great to do it now" – the last one, [2002's] *Cruelty Without Beauty*, ended up being quite a disappointing experience, and I thought, "Well, this will be a chance to do something that does kind of get it *more* right." And what it all boils down to is, I just really like writing songs with Dave. I still feel this spark there of some magic happening. I kind of hijacked his band really, because Dave wrote all the lyrics at first.

DB: I'd almost compare it to Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, it's like we kind of get married and divorced… [the new] Soft Cell is just an older, and maybe wiser, version of what it was. Definitely more reflective.

Soft Cell burned fiercely but wasn't built to last. Could it have turned out differently?

DB: There was never any career strategy. It was very hard work, but we worked even harder when it came to partying! Especially when we got to New York – ecstasy wasn't illegal. We were deliberately seeing how far we could push it. We knew [1982 video] Sex Dwarf was going to get banned… makes it a bit more salacious and juicy. We wanted notoriety, which lasts longer than being nice, I think. It all went a bit Sex Pistols at the end, the way it crashed and burned, very punk in its own way. We still do have quite a punk attitude about the whole thing.

MA: I think it's great, the way it turned out. There was no animosity and no fights and no fall out. The trouble with that is, because you've got a 17-year gap, other people will come in and fill the space that you left – you bring something out and someone goes, "Oh it sounds like the Pet Shop Boys or Erasure or Depeche Mode"…

Will there be more new Soft Cell music?

DB: I've not discussed this in depth with Marc, but I'm working on some ideas already for the follow-up, various things which are all top secret. I don't think we've got that much time, otherwise, we're both going to be in our mid-to-late seventies.

MA: I'm just not sure at the moment. If I did another Soft Cell album it wouldn't be for quite a few years. But too many times in my life I've said, "Never, never again", and I always regret it.

Tell us something you've never told an interviewer before.

DB: I'm a big fan of Maria Callas, and I saw the show they did with her in holographic form with a real orchestra. Absolutely fantastic. I got front row seats, and you could see through her, like watching a ghost performing. It was brilliant.

MA: No. I can't. I've said everything about myself that needs to be said, and everything I haven't told, I definitely want to keep to myself. I'm actually going through my archive and destroying stuff, demos, photographs, everything. I'm making a big bonfire of my life, so when I go, I'll leave nothing but what I've approved. I went out for dinner with Anohni the other week, she feels the same thing.

As told to Ian Harrison

> "Too many times I've said, 'Never, never again…' I always regret it."
> MARC ALMOND

BALL STARS
Dave's hot five.

1. **Leonard Cohen** *You Want It Darker* (COLUMBIA, 2016)
2. **David Bowie** *Valentine's Day* (ISO/COLUMBIA, 2013)
3. **Ulrich Schnauss** *Stars* (INDEPENDIENTE, 2007)
4. **Maria Callas** *O Mio Babbino Caro* (VARIOUS RECORDINGS)
5. **English Boy On The Love Ranch** *Sex Vigilante* (NEW ROSE, 1988)

LIVING MARC'S-ISM
Almond's Walker Brothers best-of.

1. **Archangel** (PHILIPS, 1966)
2. **Mrs Murphy** (PHILIPS, 1966)
3. **Just Say Goodbye** (PHILIPS, 1967)
4. **After The Lights Go Out** (PHILIPS, 1966)
5. **Deadlier Than The Male** (PHILIPS, 1966)

LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

Britt Daniel

Spoon's frontman genuflects before *The Modern Lovers* (Beserkley, 1976).

I want to talk about The Modern Lovers.

It was 1990. I was between my freshman and sophomore years at the University of Texas. I had a part-time job delivering cheeseburgers, taking a Spanish class and trying to learn how to write songs. No band, no money, no girlfriend. It was super hot and I was in the back room of this little house that didn't have any working AC, on a flight path with planes going by about 20 yards over my head every 10 minutes.

I was into the Pixies, Jane's Addiction, The Cure, and then I checked out The Modern Lovers' record from the library one afternoon. It was a game-changer – great, post-Velvets, pre-punk, full-on rock'n'roll. But the thing that completely turned my head around was Jonathan Richman's lyrics: it was confessional, a totally unique combination of insecure and totally secure. I'd never heard such a fully-realised persona, and I loved the way he so proudly went against the grain of so many sacred elements of rock'n'roll. He loved his parents and the USA, he wrote songs about being dignified and old, about not smoking pot, all these things that were decidedly not cool. Everyone around me was stoned pretty much every day and I didn't smoke weed. I did write a song about that.

I just saw him in Todd Haynes' Velvet Underground documentary and he was my favourite part of the movie. You could tell how excited he was about it, and it's been true from the beginning. He has this childlike excitement and I love that.

Eventually I did get to play with him a couple times in Austin, maybe like '94 and then '95. I told him I was a fan – he wasn't super-receptive, but I probably didn't have a very good pitch. I told him I loaned him the fuse out of my amp the year before, but I don't think he remembered.

As told to Ian Harrison

Spoon's Lucifer On The Sofa is out on February 11 on Matador.

Getty, Peter Cunningham

JANIS IAN'S ANNOUNCED HER DEFIANT FAREWELL LP. BUT IS IT REALLY GOODBYE?

NEW JERSEY-BORN veteran singer-songwriter Janis Ian is on the phone, explaining why her new album *The Light At The End Of The Line* is going to be her very last.

"You know, I'm 70," she says. "I'll be 71 next year. I'm cramming three years' worth of touring into one year to make up all the dates that Covid has cost me. I don't like being on the merry-go-round you have to be on to be a huge success, in the eyes of the world anyway. It's just become less important to me over the years."

Those years, to be precise, start with her aggressively topical 1967 hit Society's Child, extend through 1975's Grammy-winning, oft-covered At Seventeen, and continued through to the 1992 creation of her own label Rude Girl Records – now fairly brimming with Ian content, including this new set, her first full album in 15 years.

The album came together "very organically", notes Ian. "I just hate using that word, but it's appropriate. Everybody was available, everybody was excited." The cast includes Vince Gill, Viktor Krauss, Sam Bush and Diane Schuur, and the songs include some of Ian's very best work. A highlight is the anthemic Resist, its feminist message ("I cannot be your virgin/And I will not be your whore") surrounded by a relentless, point-driving military beat. It ends with an unexpected, brief organ solo – as did, for that matter, Society's Child all those years ago. "There's Easter eggs throughout the album," says Ian. "It's very deliberate."

The song had an impact on Ian's choice of album graphics too, she adds. "I wanted the album to almost be a legacy project, if that doesn't sound too pretentious. And I wanted to show my age on the album physically – because then here comes Resist, and that could be me at 16, with my fist in the air."

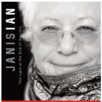
So it's full circle? "To me, this album says everything I wanted to say," she says. "There's nothing left. I don't want to spend whatever time I have left fulfilling other people's dreams of what I can do."

But surely there'll be more music? "I don't know, I honestly don't know," says Ian, who plays US dates in February and March. "I mean, I talked with a couple of friends about maybe doing a concert or two with them. I've talked with a couple of people who are saying, 'Hey, we'd like to do a tribute album. Would you guest on it?' I guest on other people's work a lot these days, and that's a pretty cool thing to be able to do."

So, then – if there is an air of finality here with *The Light At The End Of The Line*, it is the title of its closing track, Better Times Will Come, Janis Ian's last message to the world? "No! God no," she laughs. "If I wanted to get my last message to the world, that would be, 'Send me a check, please!'"

Dave DiMartino

The Light At The End Of The Line is out now on Rude Girl Records.



"There's Easter eggs throughout the whole album."
JANIS IAN

End of the line: Janis Ian comes full circle (clockwise from left) – going for gold, 1980; Janis's new LP; strolling on in later years.

The story sofa: ready to feel the vibes, the smoke and the smells, Boris (from left) – Atsuo, Wata and Takeshi.

TOKYO HEAVY MOB BORIS CELEBRATE 30 YEARS OF NOISE

"IT'S FINE IF you call us metal or psychedelic or drone," says Boris drummer Atsuo. "We're in a space where all those genres connect… our genre is 'heavy', whatever you perceive that to be!"

Chatting to MOJO via an interpreter over Zoom, the long-running Tokyo trio – completed by lead guitarist Wata and bassist/rhythm guitarist Takeshi, with all three sharing vocal duties – illustrate their eclectic creativity by nominating personal cult heroes. Wata cites the influence of David Gilmour, while Atsuo opts for the "methods and sensibilities" of canonical Russian art house director Andrei Tarkovsky. In no-frills contrast, Takeshi points to 1980s Hiroshima hardcore punk hellions Gudon – specifically their guitarist Zigyaku, who guested on Boris's previous album *No*.

Initially self-released in summer 2020, *No* combined elements of crust punk, doom and crossover thrash into a cathartic blast of speedfreak fury. It was a direct response to the coronavirus lockdown. "All we could do to stabilise our minds was make music," notes Atsuo. "We took that negative energy and put it into extreme sounds."

No ended with the pillow-soft shoegaze number Interlude, pointing the way to 2022's startlingly different, tranquil follow-up *W*. It's the sound of an emotional circle being completed: put the two titles together and you get 'Now'. This diversity has been a Boris signature since their formation in 1992. The group named themselves after a song by sludge-metal titans Melvins, with early releases such as *Absolutego* (a gargantuan, hour-long piece released on their own Fangs Anal Satan label) and the aptly-titled piledriver *Amplifier Worship* affirming their fondness for volume, distortion and volcanic power. However, the trio have always had an equally strong facility for exploring the blissful side of oceanic feedback. "We always think of contrasts," says Atsuo. "On the opposite side of our noisy music we have beauty and quiet. If something is too harsh, it doesn't seem real."

W is the 27th Boris album – not including collaborative efforts with luminaries including experimental noisenik Merzbow and Ian Astbury. They were well into their second decade before becoming an international concern in the mid-2000s with a run of extraordinary releases on Sunn O)))'s label Southern Lord, notably the kaleidoscopic *Pink*.

"Around the time that *Pink* came out, Sunn O))) put out *Black One* and Earth released *Hex*," says Atsuo. "We were all touring together and it became this organic movement: drone metal. So we felt connected to that."

And what keeps them going now? "The most important thing is playing live," he says. "That's where the energy comes from. Sharing the music with people and feeling the vibrations, the smoke, even the smells. So while we're greeting our 30th anniversary during a pandemic, we want to do something meaningful to celebrate. We're making preparations!"

Manish Agarwal

W is out now on Sacred Bones.

> "If something is too harsh, it doesn't seem real."
> **ATSUO**

DRONERANGERS

The 'A' list of Boris.

Boris
Akuma No Uta
(DIWPHALANX/SOUTHERN LORD, 2003)

A breathless slalom through acid, garage, space and stoner rock, over 39 minutes, the same as Nick Drake's *Bryter Layter*, to which the cover photo of Takeshi pays tribute. "Nick Drake is heavy too," he notes.

Boris with Sunn O)))
Altar
(SOUTHERN LORD, 2006)

Molten metal majesty and the deepest, darkest ambience abound on this supremely immersive collaboration. Guest players include Soundgarden's Kim Thayil and alt-country chanteuse Jesse Sykes, whose vocals guide beautifully widescreen standout The Sinking Belle.

Boris
Attention Please
(SARGENT HOUSE, 2011)

The underground had moved on from Boris's approach by the 2010s, meaning later LPs tend to be overlooked. *Attention Please* is their most accessible, with Wata's dreamy vocals taking the lead on synthy, diamond-perfect pop.

STEVE HACKETT
GENESIS REVISITED
FOXTROT at FIFTY
+ HACKETT HIGHLIGHTS
SEPTEMBER 2022
09 SWANSEA ARENA
10 CARDIFF ST DAVID'S HALL
11 CAMBRIDGE CORN EXCHANGE
13 AYLESBURY FRIARS WATERSIDE
14 TORQUAY PRINCESS THEATRE
16 PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL
17 BEXHILL DE LA WARR PAVILION
18 BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
20 HULL CITY HALL
22 GATESHEAD SAGE
23 GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
24 YORK BARBICAN
26 BUXTON OPERA HOUSE
27 GRIMSBY AUDITORIUM
28 NORTHAMPTON ROYAL & DERNGATE
30 SHEFFIELD CITY HALL
OCTOBER 2022
01 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
03 SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
04 IPSWICH REGENT THEATRE
05 BATH FORUM
07 LEICESTER DE MONTFORT HALL
08 LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC
09 BRIGHTON CENTRE
11 BOURNEMOUTH PAVILION
12 LONDON EVENTIM APOLLO HAMMERSMITH
MYTICKET.CO.UK
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A KILIMANJARO PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH SOLO

KILLING JOKE
HONOUR THE FIRE
UK TOUR 2022
PLUS SUPPORT
THE IMBECILES
(ALL SHOWS)
MARCH 2022
28 CARDIFF TRAMSHED
29 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
31 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
APRIL 2022
01 LIVERPOOL O2 ACADEMY
02 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE
04 MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL
05 NEWCASTLE BOILER SHOP
06 GLASGOW BARROWLAND
08 LEEDS O2 ACADEMY
SATURDAY 09 APRIL 2022
LONDON
EVENTIM APOLLO
HAMMERSMITH
SPECIAL GUEST
Brix Smith
MYTICKET.CO.UK
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AN ACTION! PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH UNITED TALENT AGENCY

ERASURE
PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS
BLANCMANGE
MAY 2022
24 ABERDEEN P&J LIVE
25 NOTTINGHAM MOTORPOINT ARENA
26 LEEDS FIRST DIRECT ARENA
28 HULL SOLD OUT ARENA
29 LIVERPOOL M&S BANK ARENA
THE NEW EP 'NE:EP'
OUT NOW ON MUTE
Ne:Ep
MYTICKET.CO.UK
ERASUREINFO.COM
A KILIMANJARO PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH X-RAY

The Way Of All Fresh: (from left) the Beastie Boys with (right) Def Jam co-founders Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons; The Magnificent Force's Fast Break spins on his head at Earth's Edge; Grand Mixer D.St in his bedroom studio.

Birth Of The Kool

Collected! **Sophie Bramly**'s photos of rap's early dawn.

"I WAS DEFINITELY at the right place at the right time," says photographer, TV presenter/producer and writer Sophie Bramly of the archive of NY rap images collected in new book Yo! The Early Days Of Hip Hop 1982-84. "But you don't know these things when you're there. I don't think anyone on the hip-hop scene had the feeling that it was going to change the world. It was a day-to-day thing, in a small community."

Consequently, hers is a view of a form in the process of becoming. Taken in rap's streets, studios and venues, it stars the scene's DJs and MCs (Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five, Run-DMC and many more) plus graffiti artists (Futura 2000, Zephyr) and breakdancers (the Rock Steady Crew, The Magnificent Force). As a photographer Bramly had already worked for Paris Match and Rock & Folk, plus French photo agencies. "I was allowed to work for France, but not for the US," she explains. "Which was one of the reasons I had so much time to take so many pictures of people in the hip-hop world."

"I think because there weren't many people caring about this whole thing, someone with a camera was always welcome," she goes on. "I took pictures as a friend, not as a threat or a stranger, and I'm still friends with Fab 5 Freddy, [Furious Five member] Rahiem, Zephyr… now they don't even recall the days when I had a camera and when I didn't. That's why the photos are what they are, because I was always around."

The book also illustrates how rap was considered "a hoodlum" thing in the still racially-divided New York, and also the process of those barriers breaking down as the punks catch on, Fab 5 Freddy connects the Bronx and the downtown arts scene and Madonna's tag appears on a scrawled-on wall. There are intimations of the future too, with scenes related to 1984's Harry Belafonte-produced rap movie Beat Street indicating the commercialisation of hip-hop.

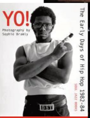
With written contributions from Def Jam publicist Bill 'Ill Badler' Adler, Slick Rick, Arthur Baker and DJ Grand Mixer D.St (who states, "Hip-hop is nothing more than soul records from your mother's collection"), Bramly recalls the times, scenes and nights at The Roxy or Roseland that she experienced as, "incredibly joyful."

"Seeing these guys with really nothing much, with such joy and energy, wanting to do so many things, was mind-blowing for me," she says. "They were kids, you know, staying at their moms', being polite to their parents… I was there four years, more or less, and the amount of time I witnessed problems was way less than I witnessed later in Europe. Only once did I hear a gunshot. On the other hand, I remember in London at a Shinehead gig, a gunshot that was way more scary than it had been in the Bronx."

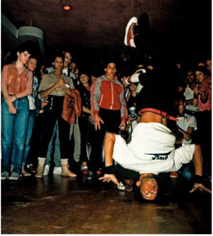
Her NY sojourn ended in 1984, and was followed by her hosting MTV Europe's rap show Yo!, and much besides. "I still love hip-hop," says Bramly, who was made a Chevalier des Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2017. "Rap music is still my major source of energy."

Ian Harrison

Yo! The Early Days Of Hip Hop 1982-84 is published by Soul Jazz Books.



"Someone with a camera was always welcome."
SOPHIE BRAMLY



Dope and glory: (clockwise from below) Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five live at The Ritz; breakers Peaches and Muhamad take it to the SoHo streets; Grandmaster Flash stares 'em out; Harry Belafonte learns to do the Electric Boogaloo on the set of Beat Street; graffiti artist DONDI up on the roof.

Southern comfort: Erin Rae takes it nice and easy.

> "It's important to bring lightness to the stage."
> ERIN RAE

LIGHTEN UP! MEET ERIN RAE, EASY-GOING MODERN WOMAN OF TRIPPY AMERICANA.

YOU KNOW your mom lives in the sticks when the local draw is the World's Largest Cedar Bucket. "Only in America," chuckles Erin Rae, whose mother's current locale – near Oxford, Mississippi – has this honour. "You get these weird attractions. Like this summer, we were on our way to Red Rocks and stopped in Kansas to see the World's Largest Ball Of Twine…"

Supersizing might be a national pastime, but it's far from Erin Rae's aesthetic. The Nashville-based singer's tunes have a simple beauty and her voice a pure clarity – a little bit country, a little bit Laurel Canyon. "When Erin opened her mouth and started singing I was hooked," says Jonathan Wilson, the producer of her bewitching new album, *Lighten Up*. "And it's the lack of affect in the vocal that makes her music so easy to listen to."

Raised Erin Rae McKaskle in Jackson, Mississippi and Nashville, Tennessee by parents who sang Judy Collins in the house, she's been a performer since the age of five, when she joined her dad on-stage for a chorus of Tex Williams's 1947 hit Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette). Later, she quit college after one semester to try her luck as a singer-songwriter. "My dad was so encouraging of it," she says. "I suppose I've always been a daddy's girl. Whatever he thinks is cool is OK by me."

What Mike McKaskle thought cool included Doc Watson and Mississippi John Hurt – the heritage music of the American South. Rae carries some of that gravity while exploring themes she hopes challenge her homeland's cultural climate. Recent single Modern Woman called for the junking of some old-fashioned definitions of femininity and was accompanied by a video featuring friends from across the distaff spectrum, including Brittany Howard. Crucially, it's more finger-popping than finger-wagging – a balance Rae is keen to strike.

"I have a song called Bad Mind from my last record that's talking about being afraid to be gay in the South," she reminds MOJO. "And I have songs about mental illness. At the same time, it's important to bring lightness to the stage. I don't wanna be, 'Hey guys! Now we're gonna play you this song about depression!'"

Rae's two previous albums have delivered their heavy payloads with a gentle touch. *Lighten Up* takes that sense of Zen ease with life's crises to another level. Working with Rae in his Topanga studio, Jonathan Wilson has added a subtly '60s sizzle. "I knew I wanted to feature Erin's voice above all," he says. "But the demos were beautiful and trippy, so we wanted to expand on the psychedelia."

One thing Wilson left alone is Rae's habitually leisurely pacing. In fact, Rae reveals, he slowed one song, the opening Candy & Curry, until it was more languid still.

"I keep joking that, like, one day I'll write a faster song," shrugs Rae, "but I have too much of that Taurus energy. Take it easy, y'know?"

Danny Eccleston

Lighten Up is released by Thirty Tigers on February 4.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Skeeter Davis, Judee Sill, Joan Shelley
- Rae bonded with guitarist-producer Jonathan Wilson (Roger Waters, Father John Misty) over a love for Bobbie Gentry and Scott Walker. Rae: "I love those cinematic pop sounds."
- Guests on *Lighten Up* include keysman/arranger Drew Erickson (Weyes Blood, Lana Del Rey) and, on Can't See Stars, indie singer-songwriter Kevin Morby. "Kevin agreed to try my idea for a Nancy & Lee-style vocal," says Rae. "I love it so much."
- The Oxford cedar bucket's record status was formerly challenged by another in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, until it was torched in a mysterious arson attack.

KEY TRACKS

- Candy & Curry
- Cosmic Sigh
- Clean Slate

OUT OF THE LONDON MELTING POT: THE PAN-GLOBAL "ZING-ZANG" TWANG OF LOS BITCHOS!

LOS BITCHOS's lead guitarist Serra Petale was drumming with London indie-rockers Kid Wave when her eureka moment arrived. Playing a compilation album called *The Roots Of Chicha: Psychedelic Cumbias From Peru*, she came across the sashaying instrumental A Patricia by Los Destellos – a 1960s combo credited with introducing the electric guitar to Peruvian indigenous musics. The discovery sparked a life-changing realisation.

"I was like, 'Ah, right, of course you can do an instrumental band – why *can't* you?'" Petale recalls today. She'd been playing guitar privately at home, but "lyricism never came to me", and A Patricia showed her how she could express her tequila-bumping personality without the necessity for words.

Petale, who grew up in Western Australia, shared her find with her friend Josefine Jonsson, who'd moved to London from Sweden to play bass in punk bands. Together with the Uruguayan woman who'd hipped them to cumbia's dance-crazy pleasures, keytar beginner Agustina Ruiz, the three formed Los Bitchos in late 2016, quickly sourcing Brit drummer Nic Crawshaw via a shout-out on Facebook.

A quintessentially London collision of cultures, Los Bitchos's music contains more than just straight-ahead cumbia, with strong flavours of surf-guitar twang and exotica thrown in. While Ruiz brings diverse South American influences, Petale is half Turkish and had grown up listening to Turkish psych-rockers like Bariş Manço, which, she says, "is where that little bit of zing-zang comes in". "Plus," adds Jonsson, "me and Nic used to be in punk bands and didn't grow up with a lot of world music. We don't know the rules of certain genres, but we *do* know how to play with a bit of attitude."

> "We know how to play with attitude."
> JOSEFINE JONSSON

After debuting in the capital's dives, their infectious sound and vision soon landed them a European tour support with Mac DeMarco. And while opening for NYC post-punks Bodega at Dalston's Shacklewell Arms, they wowed Alex Kapranos from Franz Ferdinand, who subsequently produced their debut single.

"He came to a lot of our rehearsals," reveals Petale, "and really helped us bring the best out of the songs." The relationship gradually extended into an opulent debut album, *Let The Festivities Begin!*, bubbling over with upful moods, irresistible grooves and, indeed, pan-global 'zing-zang'.

"We've never talked about long-term goals," Jonsson concludes of their in-the-moment ethos. "We don't overthink it. We're all so happy with what is right in front of us."

Andrew Perry

Let The Festivities Begin! is released by City Slang on February 4.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: The Surfaris, Khruangbin, the Pulp Fiction soundtrack
- 'Los Bichos', without the 't', means 'the bugs' in Spanish, and it was non-Spaniard Serra Petale's idea to bastardise the phrase. "Honestly, it was a spur-of-the-moment thing," she laughs. "I was like, 'Yeah, cool – instrumental, Turkish, cumbia – Los Bichos, but with 'bitch' in it!'"
- *Let The Festivities Begin!* was mostly cut at Gallery studio, a facility owned by Roxy Music's Phil Manzanera. They'd just about finished recording when Covid lockdown arrived in March 2020, but had to wait a few months to add final overdubs, and then another year before the album could be released with any prospect of touring.
- During lockdown, the band kept busy with their own radio show, Planet Bitchos, on Gilles Peterson's internet station Worldwide FM. Explains Petale, "We would visit a different country for each show, and chat about the music, basically like a virtual tour when you couldn't tour."

Going global: Los Bitchos (from left) Nic Crawshaw, Josefine Jonsson, Agustina Ruiz and Serra Petale.

Tom Mitchell, Getty

MOJO PLAYLIST

Into the future! With helium-bossa, dronepunk and the blues.

1 ALDOUS HARDING LAWN
The queen of international auxiliary language lyricism makes her glorious return, singing something about B-sides in the style of a woman trapped in a helium balloon, in bossa nova. From new LP *Warm Chris*.
Find it: *streaming services*

2 SISTER COOKIE AIN'T NO GOOD (BUT IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME)
The Lagos-London jazz/blues blaster states love's imperfections with purifying candour.
Find it: *streaming services*

3 DESTROYER TINTORETTO, IT'S FOR YOU
Dan Bejar's more than usually deranged on this teaser from 13th LP *Labyrinthitis* (due in March). Electro beats, pop synths and jazz piano duel as he hallucinates "palm trees stooping to kiss the bishop's ring". Painterly.
Find it: *streaming services*

4 75 DOLLAR BILL BLACK TO COMM/9 TO 5
Gnarly dronepunk cut'n'shut of the MC5 and Dolly Parton. A crate-rattling, sax-honking, rabble-rousing skronk insurrection.
Find it: *Bandcamp*

5 KHRUANGBIN & LEON BRIDGES B-SIDE
From Feb's Texas Moon EP, this hazy bong-load of Afro-Latin mystery funk sounds like it's been plucked from a gold dust-sprinkled box of vintage 45s, in a dream.
Find it: *YouTube*

6 LIA ICES HYMN
The fertile earth of Moon Mountain, CA, where Lia Ices and family live on a winery, yields wistful, end-of-summery Americana.
Find it: *streaming services*

7 SYLPH ANCIENT HOLE
The title track from an industrial-electro solo EP by Thomas Cohen (S.C.U.M). Mellow, anxious, and well goth.
Find it: *streaming services*

8 SON HOUSE PREACHIN' BLUES
The Lazarus of the Delta blues, raw in '64. From the unheard live recordings released in March as *Forever On My Mind* on Dan Auerbach's Easy Eye label.
Find it: *YouTube*

9 DOWDELIN MAMA WÉ
Creole Afro-futurist ecological lament featuring a taut, metallic voodoo groove from Togolese funkster Vaudou Game (AKA Peter Solo). From new album *Lanmou Lanmou*.
Find it: *streaming platforms*

10 ZOLTAN FECSO BUTTERFLY HANDS
Melbourne composer puts bells inside his piano, makes delicate, jazz-adjacent hay. Spiritual balm for Necks fans, especially.
Find it: *Bandcamp*

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THE MOJO INTERVIEW

Transcending grunge, **Pearl Jam's brooding baritone** has fought **his demons,** the ticket agents, **and his President.** Today, he takes each day **as a challenge** to his devotion to **"all that's sacred".** "The bar keeps rising," insists **Eddie Vedder**.

Interview by **KEITH CAMERON** • Portrait by **DANNY CLINCH**

"ONE SECOND…"

Eddie Vedder gets up mid-question, leaving us with an unimpeded view of the music room in his Seattle home: a few amplifiers, a piano, the walls hung with photographs, presentation discs and some guitars. After a few moments' off-screen clinking, Eddie reappears with a Corona, levering the top off with his cigarette lighter. "I'll join you!" he beams, raising his bottle to MOJO's pint glass, 5,000 miles away.

Two weeks short of his 57th birthday, Vedder is the very model of the middle-aged mixed-up kid, with the beer and smokes in the afternoon, his jacket/shorts/baseball cap/Who T-shirt ensemble detailed with a PiL pin. During early summer, he began recording *Earthling*, his third solo album, with Andrew Watt, the Grammy-winning producer of Justin Bieber and Miley Cyrus. In late September, he premiered two of its songs at Ohana, the festival he's curated at California's Doheny State Beach since 2016. Ohana also saw Pearl Jam's return to live action, their first run of shows since a scheduled 2020 tour in support of their eleventh album *Gigaton* became an early casualty of the Covid pandemic.

"Been travelling a lot," Eddie nods. "We played the new record for some people over the weekend, the first time in a while I've travelled without carrying 50lbs of books and papers and lyrics. Some of the lyrical content is heavy too, so I was wondering if that added to the weight of the bag."

Vedder is no stranger to heavy. Born Edward Severson in the Chicago suburbs, then relocated to San Diego as a preteen, he was four months old when his parents divorced, and grew up believing his stepfather to be his father and his biological father a family friend. Upon learning the truth at 17, he took his mother's maiden name. This thorny origin story became the basis for Alive, the first song Vedder wrote for the nascent Pearl Jam in October 1990, after his drummer friend Jack Irons had recommended him to Seattle proto-grunge scene alumni Jeff Ament and Stone Gossard, whose band Mother Love Bone had ended when singer Andrew Wood died of a heroin overdose.

So began a 30-year odyssey, which saw Pearl Jam catapult to fame on the back of 1991 debut album *Ten*'s stew of trad rock grandiloquence and Gen-X angst, plus a relentless touring ethic and MTV ubiquity. The weight sat unhappily with Vedder, a shy man hiding inside a dramatic baritone, but even as 1993's *Vs* sold a scarcely fathomable 950,000 copies in its first week, he was plotting a withdrawal. Pearl Jam made no more videos, gave no interviews, kicked back against Ticketmaster, and reconfigured their music toward an ascetic hardcore mysticism, reducing sales yet nourishing a sense of collective integrity, while also stoking a devoted fanbase via officially sanctioned ➤

WE'RE NOT WORTHY

Pete Townshend on his pal's West London links.

"I first met Eddie in 1993 after a show in San Francisco. The first thing he said was, 'I don't want to be famous. I want to run away.' And I said to him, 'I'm afraid it's too late.' Since then we've become very good friends. I love his loyalty and commitment to his band. He's also big mates with my brother Paul – people in Paul's Ealing local know him well!"

Shutterstock

bootlegs of their legendarily epic shows. These deep bonds saw them through the trauma of 2000's Roskilde Festival, when nine fans died in a crush during Pearl Jam's set.

Today's Eddie Vedder has found a happy accommodation between his private and public selves, a dude who can call Bruce Springsteen and Fugazi's Ian MacKaye friends, as comfortable hanging with the Cosmic Psychos as Barack Obama. "All that's sacred comes from youth," he sang in Pearl Jam's 1994 song Not For You, a punked update of the teenage Vedder's first love, The Who, and an imperative he's upheld throughout. "Certainly," he chuckles, "if there's more than one life, this has got to be the best one."

Why a solo record now? And this particular type of solo record – extrovert, quite unlike your previous two?

All happenstance. I liked that it came out of doing something positive. It started with a pro-vaccination benefit, organised by Global Citizen, back in May, and then I ended up going to this guy Andrew Watt's studio. I'd known him a bit, as a fan of our group, but I didn't know his work. Then we really connected over the phone last winter, sharing music. He was working on the Morrissey record, some of the best Morrissey stuff I'd heard in years. So I was curious to see his studio. He was working a lot with Chad Smith and Josh Klinghoffer, getting great sounding results. And so just as we were visiting, we started writing. One song turned into two, then turned into three and four within two days. It felt like the starting gun had gone off. We were still in semi lockdown, so people were energised to create. We could test in the morning every day, we created a little bubble, and he works really quick. So I was inspired to write quick. Everything was sounding great, and his ability to mix and have everything be loud… It was just a new adventure, and it was inspiring.

Amid many eye-catching collaborators – Elton John, Ringo Starr, Stevie Wonder – perhaps most notable is your father.

Well, I didn't really get to know my real father. I met him maybe three or four times as a kid, but he was, you know, a friend of the family. It would have been nice to have been in a room with him at some point before he died when I was 13. It would have been nice to share that I knew that he was my pop, but it didn't happen. But the crazy thing that did happen was that about 10 years ago, the Chicago Cubs, some of their old timers get together and play baseball for about a week, and I would go down there every other year and hang with these guys, learn about the game more so I can teach my kids more, you know, I coach baseball. One of the ex-players, this erudite badass trumpeter, who used to play third base, his name is Carmen Fanzone. He also became head of the Musicians Union in Los Angeles – an incredibly cool individual. I saw Carmen playing the horn in a little club in Arizona, and this guy playing keyboards with him had been best friends with my dad. Two years later, he brought me some photos of them in little basement studios. Then a couple years after that, he brought me five songs of my dad singing, on a disc. I carried that disc around for two, three months in my suitcase, not ready to hear it. Finally, I got the guts, and after a couple bottles of wine played it one night in Argentina. And he was good. It was incredible – like he left a message for me.

So that's your dad, singing in the '70s, sampled on your new album 50 years later?

We built a little collage around his voice. I thought of the record like a setlist – by the end, that's when you start bringing out special guests. We had Stevie and Elton, Ringo was an incredible addition. And then my pop gets to be on a record with those guys, which is not too shabby.

Discovering the truth about your parentage was the subject of Alive, the first lyric you wrote for Pearl Jam. Had you visited that territory in any of your previous groups, or did your new band's music put you into a different emotional headspace?

A great question… (*reaches for cigarettes*). Notice how as soon as you bring up the past I get a little tense (*laughs*). OK, I think you have to be right. I always think there was maybe something subconscious in the music, pre-having lyrics – because their loss was Andy [Wood]. I had been dealing with the reality of my father situation for probably 10 years at that point, but not *really* having dealt with it. I mean, I knew about it, but I never really processed it in any way, certainly not any way that was healthy. I'd feel his presence every once in a while as I was slogging through rough times, just doing my best to make a living and be a good human, and write some songs on the side, attempting to be in a band, attempting to play shows. So I would kind of look to him for guidance – that symbolic Obi-Wan Kenobi in the sky. So maybe there was just something inherent in that music that brought it up.

You moved from California to Seattle to join. What were the pros and cons of being the Pearl Jam outsider?

Well, I guess I could be myself. I could create someone that was me. I felt I could be pure about it. Those are the pros. The cons? I was intensely intimidated. I imagine there must have been some kind of, "Who the fuck is this guy?", especially from all the people that loved Stone and Jeff and loved Mother Love Bone. And I'm sure there was a few local singers that thought they were next up for the job, so I was

A LIFE IN PICTURES

Ed shots: you Vedder, you bet!

1 The kid is alright: Eddie Vedder as a young man.

2 Mixed signals: Bad Radio, 1988 (from left) Dave George, Joey Ponchetti, Eddie Vedder, Dave Silva.

3 Reading the riot act: Eddie fights back against the war on terror, Rod Laver Arena, Melbourne, February 18, 2003.

4 Five against the world: *Ten*-era Pearl Jam (from left) Eddie Vedder, Mike McCready, Dave Abbruzzese, Stone Gossard, Jeff Ament.

5 People have the power: last night of the Vote For Change Tour, October 13, 2004 (from left) Jackson Browne, John Fogerty, Vedder, Bruce Springsteen.

6 Gonna see my friend: Vedder enjoys a cuddle with Pete Townshend after their set at the New York Supper Club, July 28, 1999.

7 No need to say goodbye: Vedder and Chris Cornell at the Bridge School Benefit Concert, October 26, 2014.

8 Closer than ever: Pearl Jam today (from left) Gossard, McCready, Matt Cameron, Vedder, Ament.

9 Live in the present tense: Vedder on-stage at the RAI Parkhal, Amsterdam, November 6, 1996.

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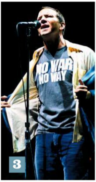

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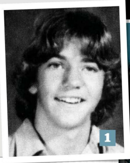

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Courtesy of Eddie Vedder, Getty (5), Alamy (2)

placed under some scrutiny there. But I've been immensely grateful ever since for the camaraderie. And thank goodness, because it was such a tight community. I could have been eschewed immediately. Kim Thayil and Matt Cameron, Chris Cornell, all of Soundgarden were very kind to me. Then getting to know the Fastbacks, getting to know Mudhoney… it was a real communal feel. It maybe took a little while, but not that long, just a matter of months to feel supported. I used to read linernotes about The Who, y'know, what was happening on Tuesdays at the Marquee, and wish I had been born 15 years earlier on a different part of the planet, into this scene in London and all these great bands. And then waking up one day and realising that you were actually part of something like that, in Seattle. Mudhoney and Nirvana! I just really loved that music. I was 25 years old, thinking that I'd give it a few more years before I'd have to settle down, bite the bullet and become Mr Normal. Grow up! So it was a gift. My job for the last 30 years is just respecting that gift.

On Pearl Jam's first European visit in spring 1992, your tourbook listed the following aliases: Hugh Mility, Juan Badapple, Jim Rockford, Hugh Jeego and Guy Jantic. Which were you?

I think I was Hugh Mility (*laughs*). Stone was Hugh Jeego… It's almost tradition. John Entwistle had one of my favourites, it was Mrs Reckonwith – Amanda Reckonwith. I'm a custodian of some historical Who gear and I got a small book of John's lyrics, incredible bits of writing, you can really see how his mind works. The very last page, you turn it over and it just says: "I never thought it would end like this."

You first met Pete Townshend in 1993, at a point when your band were big and about to get much bigger. According to his memoir: "[Eddie] was having problems adjusting to fame and was thinking about going back to being a surfer… I gave him my philosophy: we don't make the choice, the public does. We are elected by them, even if we never stood for office. Accept it." Was that helpful?

Absolutely helpful. I don't think anybody was ready. If you're in a boy band or a pop group, then I guess you maybe feel groomed into that elevated level of recognition. But for us it really hit… You can't be normal. You'd almost have to become another thing in order to survive with that kind of pressure. It's like getting the bends. You'd have to come up slow, so the bubbles don't form in your blood. That was my hyperbaric chamber moment, I guess, when I was talking with Pete. I look back on it, like, wow, I finally got to meet up with the guy whose music and words had rescued me on so many occasions. I wish he could have been meeting someone who was a little stronger at that time. But I guess he asked how I was doing and I guess I told him (*laughs*).

"Moving to Seattle, I was intensely intimidated. There must have been some kind of, 'Who the fuck is this guy?'"

You survived that vertiginous experience of sudden celebrity, where other frontmen in the Seattle scene, friends of yours, did not. What stood you in better stead?

(*Long pause*) I don't know. I think the biggest thing was maybe because music had always been so important to me, and being fully aware of this opportunity to make it, and make it with other good humans, and having some pretty good humans on the receiving end of it, supporting us. I think having the utmost gratitude for that opportunity is probably a pretty good impetus not to fuck it up. And really wanting to get better. If our group felt like we could rest on our laurels after a couple of records, maybe it would have been different.

I've just been… 'desperate' is not the right word, because that has different connotations, but really driven to still write something even better or more communicative. The bar keeps rising and our band gets better. And the challenge is still on.

In 2014, Stone recalled being "worried" during the making of *Vitalogy* [1994] – essentially because you took more control over the band's musical direction. How was it from your perspective?

If I remember correctly, we talked about how Mudhoney was a different-sounding group than our group, and I was feeling… I'm just going to answer this candidly because it's the truth or at least how I remember, and I hope it doesn't come off sounding like a prick, but at that point, I felt like I was becoming the face of the music. And I didn't really want the mantle, but if I was going to be the face of the music then I wanted the music to be something I could live with, or be most proud of. I guess I didn't want to be known for Daughter and Black and …Small Town, even though I wrote it. I just was into something hopefully a little heavier. I don't really remember it being any kind of takeover, or a hostile takeover, anything like that. The second record [*Vs*, 1993] was difficult, ➢

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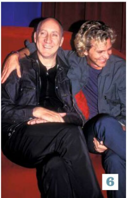
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The earthling at work: "You can always write – you just need to sit down and do it."

"We welcome it if **something that we say does not fit perfectly** with the people that come to the show. **It's part of democracy**."

because we knew people were gonna hear it. The first one was a miracle time of writing and freedom, and so the second record was a little tricky. And then all I did was bring in Corduroy and Not For You and a few other things. The bottom line is, I wanted the music to be a little more aggressive, a little more representative of what was going on in my brain.

By the end of making *No Code* [1996], again in Stone's view, things had become much more collaborative. So was everyone down with the new order from then onwards?

It's all part of growing and we all handled that and experienced it differently. Our dear friend [PJ guitarist] Mike McCready was going through issues of sobriety. And I feel like when he kind of came out of it around that time, he woke up – as if he was going through stuff that we had figured out by the second record, he was just waking up into it on the fourth. We've been a band through it all, and have had each other's backs. And now are without a doubt closer than ever.

The policy of disengagement from the machinery of selling the band: no videos, no interviews or photo shoots, the stand-off with Ticketmaster which affected your ability to tour. Was that unanimously popular within the group?

I can't remember, but apparently we were able to be galvanised about it. I feel like by not doing as much press or any at all, and not doing videos, it enabled us to stay more focused on music, more focused on the live shows, more focused on how we treat people

that come to the shows. You know, the other stuff felt like it was threatening the music. And even our having a high profile was threatening our music. So it just came out of protection of something that we felt was sacred.

Did that protection extend to self-censorship of the music itself? *Binaural* [2000] and *Riot Act* [2002] weren't exactly singing to the wider world beyond the church – whereas the outtakes from those albums, songs like Down, were obvious singles.

I regret that. I remember thinking Down was one of the more listenable songs (*laughs*). And I liked the lyrical content – we were discussing [socialist historian] Howard Zinn, nothing could be polluted in that lyric if it's about Howard. For whatever reason, at some point, we felt that 'one song here is not like the other'. But I think that was a mistake to not have that on *Riot Act*.

You mentioned Pete Townshend's good advice about coping with fame, and you later turned to him after Roskilde. You've also sought life advice from Ian MacKaye, on the night Kurt Cobain died, and Bruce Springsteen counselled you in 2004 about your stepfather. Do these relationships represent the older brother you never had?

Yeah, I'm the oldest of four in my family. And I've been really lucky to have some great older brothers. John Doe [from X] is another one. Tom Petty was just always so gracious and kind. But you kind of learn by example. And as a person who grew up with music as their lifeline, it's one of the single greatest aspects of what this journey has been – being in a band and then getting respect from your peers and getting to have these deep-seated relationships. Michael Stipe's another, we're really close.

There's a song on *Earthling* called Brother The Cloud – "I had a brother/But now my brother is gone". I wondered if that had been inspired by losing Chris Cornell, another surrogate older brother?

No, that's… There's a few Chris's I know, and one of them is my brother. I lost him a number of years ago in a tragic climbing accident. That was immediate and horrific. But you start with non-fiction, and then turn it into fiction. Write what you know, but colour it with story.

Have you ever suffered from writer's block?

I'd never admit to it! You can always write. I mean, you can sit around, you can wait for some kind of divine thought where your words come out the end of your pencil, and that does happen. But some days, if you get up in the morning and just start stirring concrete and laying bricks, by the end of the day, you're going to have built something. Typewriters are great for that. Blank sheets of paper. You just need to sit down and do it. Open the dictionary to a word and see where that takes you. It's like being in a group. Everybody's been watching Get Back, and for good reason – it's Shakespearean drama! But there's so many lessons in that nine, 10 hours. By just showing up, and being together, something will happen.

The last Pearl Jam album, *Gigaton*, was self-produced and arrived seven years after its predecessor, your longest gap between records. Was that a by-product of the 'five guys making a pizza' syndrome?

I have to admit, it was time-consuming. And now most everybody has families and home lives – parenting is no easy job if you're going to do it well and don't want to live with regrets. So I think that's one of the reasons it stretched out. Also, we would go on tour. We'd do a month here, a month off, and a month there, and then we'd get into the studio but only get so much done. I'll take some responsibility – writing lyrics, it's not always there when you want it to be. Also, we had done some records with Brendan O'Brien where we would work pretty quick, and we were a little bit over that, wanted to tinker around a bit. And it was recording in our own space, our own little clubhouse. We would hear about how Radiohead made records, that they would just spend time and tinker. Luxuriating in the process a bit. Of course, there's a danger in that – where's the momentum?

Pearl Jam have maintained momentum, amid the highest highs and the lowest lows. Has there ever been a point where you felt it was over?

It's never really come close. If it did, it didn't last more than a day. The other guys might have a different answer… I just felt that the sum was greater than any of its parts. And, there's a certain amount of folks out there that care about our music and care about the five individuals that make it, and I think at this point it's part of our job to manicure that, or be a custodian of that music. The things we have to complain about are not within the band, they're with the divisiveness in our country. If we can't keep it together as a band, how do we expect our country to keep it together, or our politicians to keep it together? It's such an important time to be unified, and we're just going in the opposite direction. We're talking about dealing in the Supreme Court now with issues that were dealt with 50 years ago. I'm in for a bit of nostalgia every once in a while, but… this is so like an automobile stuck in reverse. And as we know, it's very difficult to steer when you're going in reverse.

The dynamic with your fans has occasionally reflected America's division – most notably in 2003 when you dissented from the mainstream post-9/11 consensus. It must have been tough getting booed and pelted with coins simply for playing a song called Bu$hleaguer and telling the truth.

Part of having a certain profile is being able to connect with people like Howard Zinn, or Joe Wilson, the guy who wrote the paper about the false claim of weapons of mass destruction. You're having direct contact with the people who have the best information. And I feel there's a responsibility there. I mean, you don't have to do it. But we welcome it if something that we say, or feel or believe, does not fit perfectly with the people that come to the show, or if they have an alternate view. That's just part of the conversation, it's part of democracy. It's not supposed to be pretty.

What does the band's future look like?

We'll make a record with Andrew, I believe. We've already talked about it. You know, the pandemic came right as we were leaving for a tour on the *Gigaton* record. And we had a lot of shows planned. Two-thirds of those shows were put on sale, even. So one thing we'll be doing in 2022 is making good on promises to play those shows. Then, in between, I think we'll be recording, because now we've got a strong, healthy ambition to do so. I think we'll move quick for a year or two, then I can see us slowing down a little bit. We have the ability to play better than ever, but also know that we want to maintain the health of the group and want to keep coming back.

The song Not For You always felt like your My Generation statement, and yet like Pete Townshend you still seem compelled by the mythic energy of being in a rock band. Does that get harder the older you get?

Practically speaking, the only thing you need is an extra day off here and there. A little time to recover and stay in top shape without destroying what you've worked so hard to get to. I mean, that statement, "all that's sacred comes from youth" – I think it still rings true. Those are the devotions that hit you when you're young, when you have the time to be devotional, or the tree of cynicism has yet to take root. The great thing is when those early devotions turn out to be something worthwhile, or healthy – a great band, not a dangerous drug.

What's the thing about you that would most surprise people?

Wow, I don't think I would have any objectivity on that (*laughs*). Umm… that I've enjoyed your company?! That's the thing! That I actually enjoy doing an interview once every couple of years.

Danny Clinch

ED HERITAGE

Beyond grunge: Vedder's voyage, by **Keith Cameron**.

THE FUTURE-PROOFER

Pearl Jam
No Code
★★★★★
(EPIC, 1996)

From amid Pearl Jam's self-imposed lockdown came this stunning regeneration, driven by new drummer Jack Irons, who provided polyrhythmic space for the band's experimental yearnings. The edgy quietude of I'm Open deployed post-rock austerity, while Present Tense bled grunge's down-tuned gloom into a euphoric new dawn, with Vedder summoning a fresh voice for this lost youth elegy. Lukin, meanwhile, boiled the singer's stalker hell into a 62-second hardcore tribute to Mudhoney's bassist.

THE OUTDOOR TROUBADOUR

Eddie Vedder
Into The Wild
★★★
(J/BMG, 2007)

Vedder's first solo album is ostensibly a soundtrack to his friend Sean Penn's film about US adventurer Christopher McCandless's fateful trek to Alaska, though Vedder delivered far more material than was used on-screen. Writing to someone else's strict brief clearly gave the singer cause to reassess his craft, and Vedder's flair for the epic campfire ballad yielded emotive results, especially on Rise and Hard Sun, the latter featuring skyscraping harmonies from Sleater-Kinney's Corin Tucker.

THE GLOBAL WARNING

Pearl Jam
Gigaton
★★★★
(MONKEYWRENCH/REPUBLIC, 2020)

The release of Pearl Jam's conceptual eco-summit unfortunately coincided with the Covid pandemic, but real world events couldn't diminish the salience of its core theme: a planet on the brink. Beyond sorrowful visions of climate apocalypse (Retrograde) and exhortations to kick against its enablers (Never Destination), the record revealed a band still seeking new routes (Dance Of The Clairvoyants' mutant disco), ultimately vindicating Vedder's tireless belief in the power of song.

Hi fidelity: Al Green in an outtake from Bud Lee's cover shoot for *Let's Stay Together*, 1971.

Hi PRIEST Of SOUL

In January 1972 came the album that defined **AL GREEN**'s unique mix of sex and spirituality, plus the sophisticated sound of producer Willie Mitchell and his Hi Rhythm Section band.

But before *Let's Stay Together* could work its magic, writes **BOB MEHR**, its creators struck out on a voyage of discovery: "We had to find ourselves before we could really make that music."

Portrait: **BUD LEE**

THE OLD MOVIE THEATRE at 1320 S. Lauderdale Street in South Memphis is the site of Royal Studios, home to Hi Records. On this night, the usual soulful sounds have been replaced by raised voices and recriminations. It is the autumn of 1971 and Al Green is stood at his microphone, shaking his head at the figure in the control room above.

Producer Willie Mitchell has been pushing Green to dub vocals on a new song they've written, and that the studio's crack house band, the Hi Rhythm Section, has cut. Green is singing it one way and Mitchell is hearing it another. This battle of wills has been going on for days.

The producer and singer have been working together closely for nearly three years, and have just recently scored their first hits – but Mitchell feels something's been missing from their collaborations thus far.

As the tape rolls, he urges Green to soften his delivery, to sing more naturally. "Sing like Al!" Mitchell squawks. "Sing like Al Green!"

"I guess I don't know how Al Green is supposed to sing like," counters Green, hearing the same demand for what seems like the hundredth time.

"You don't know?" Mitchell jeers. "You Al Green, ain't you?"

With each take, with each attempt, Green tries on another voice, another approach, but Mitchell refuses to relent: "No! Sing it like Al Green!"

Finally pushed to the point of tears, Green flees the studio, jumps into his Corvette and peels out of the parking lot in a frustrated rage.

When he calms down and returns several hours later, Green is ready to throw the whole song away. "I won't even put no emotion into it," he thinks. "I'm going to sing it like it's nothing." ➤

Bud Lee Picture Maker

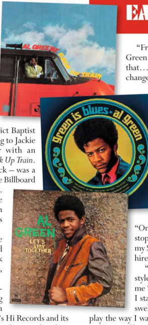
Mitchell cues up the track, and Green tries again. This time there are no exhortations, no affectations, just a gentle breath that passes between his lips, forming a fragrant falsetto.

"I-I-I-I'm so in love with you," coos Green, quavering his words. "Whatever you want to do… is all right with meeeeeee."

When the song ends a few minutes later, Green is startled by Mitchell's ecstatic voice blaring into his headphones: *"That's it! That's Al! Sing like that!"*

As Green would recall, "That's how it all started, really." Let's Stay Together – both the song and the 1972 album of the same name – was the moment Green's idiosyncratic songwriting truly blossomed and the point at which the backing of the Hi Rhythm Section fully flourished: the apotheosis of the most soulful singer, band, and producer of the era, if not of all time.

"'FREE MUSIC' TO ME IS MUSIC WITHOUT BOUNDARIES. THE BOUNDARIES ARE FROM THE SKY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH." AL GREEN



ALBERT LEORNS GREENE, OR Green – the spelling he'd later prefer – was born in April 1946 in Forrest City, Arkansas, the sixth of 10 children in a devoutly religious family. When the family relocated to Michigan he began singing gospel in a group with his brothers. After his strict Baptist father kicked him out of the house for listening to Jackie Wilson records, he launched his career with an album for the tiny Hot Line in 1967, called *Back Up Train*.

Green's first single – the album's title track – was a small breakout, making the middle rungs of the Billboard pop chart, but his career soon sputtered. Stranded in Midland, Texas in late 1968, he asked if he could earn a few dollars singing with Memphis bandleader Willie Mitchell, who was performing in town that night.

"He started singing, and I heard that voice and I said, *'Ah-ha! Look what I found here,'*" said Mitchell, who told Green he should come back to Memphis with him. Given 18 months, Mitchell promised he could make him a star.

Mitchell had been waiting for a special singer like Green to come along, almost expecting it, as if a prophecy to be fulfilled. He had been working as an artist and producer at Memphis's Hi Records and its Royal Studios since the early 1960s – slowly transforming the white rock'n'roll label into a black R&B powerhouse, stoked by a crack band: the Hodges brothers – Mabon 'Teenie' Hodges on guitar, Leroy 'Flick' Hodges on bass, and Charles Hodges on organ and piano – along with ex-Stax drummer Howard Grimes, with frequent contributions from Booker T & The M.G.'s' drummer/songwriter Al Jackson Jr. (Mitchell's stepson, keyboardist Archie 'Hubbie' Turner, would join the group after serving in Vietnam.)

But Green's 1969 debut for Hi, *Green Is Blues*, did not prove an immediate success. Part of the problem was that Green's originals did not match up to its covers.

"After the first album, Willie said Al needed to get a writer… because he couldn't write," recalled Teenie Hodges. "I went out to Al's house, and I said, 'Your lyrics are great but you don't know music.' He had messed around with the guitar, so I took it and started teaching him to play guitar. From me teaching him, he could sing and hear the changes. From there, it got to be most of the stuff was original, and Al was doing them himself."

By the summer of 1971, Green's confidence in his writing was growing, following the success of his second Hi album, *Al Green Gets Next To You*, which featured four of his own tunes, including the US Number 11 pop hit Tired Of Being Alone, as well as a gritty reworking of The Temptations' I Can't Get Next To You that landed at Number 11 on the R&B chart.

With his third album for Hi – an LP whose nine songs included seven Green originals or co-writes – he would fully embrace a stylistic approach he called "free music".

"Free music to me is music without boundaries," Green told author Glenn O'Brien in 1972. "It's music that… says you don't have to play a blues in three chord changes. See what I'm saying? Music that can go from any range. The boundaries are from the sky to the centre of the earth."

Always at the core of Green's music was the church. "He was so spiritual," said Charles Hodges. "Al always sung gospel. He had that spiritual intake in everything that he would do. I had been playing piano in church so I could relate with him."

Charles Hodges' organ would become the key sound on *Let's Stay Together*. Again it was Willie Mitchell who broke the ground in which Hodges' own style could grow.

"For a long time, I was trying to play like [jazz organist] Jimmy Smith," said Hodges. "One day we were recording and all of a sudden Willie stopped. He said, 'Charles, I don't want to hear Jimmy Smith. If I wanted to hear Jimmy Smith I would've hired Jimmy Smith. I want to hear *you*, Charles.'

"From that very moment, everything changed. My style of playing and everything. Willie always called me 'Do Funny' – that was his nickname for me. 'Cos I started to do that funny stuff on the keyboard: the swells, the different chord voicings. I was afraid to play the way I wanted to play. But Willie said, 'Man, be yourself,' and I started being myself.

"All of us – me, Al, everyone – we had to first find ourselves before we could really make that music."

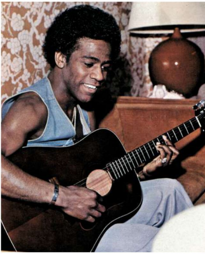
OVER THE COURSE OF HIS FIRST TWO ALBUMS FOR Hi, Green had proven himself a gifted chameleon. As Mitchell conceded, "He had mid range, high range, low range, every kind of range." But what Mitchell wanted was something unique. There was a natural softness, an essential vulnerability in Green's voice that he seemed somehow reluctant to embrace.

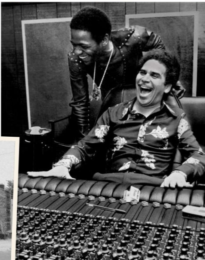
"He was singing too hard at that stage," said Mitchell. "He was still singin' hard on I Can't Get Next To You and Tired Of Being Alone, but with Let's Stay Together we went into another bag."

Improbably, Mitchell had drawn musical inspiration for the jazzy Let's Stay Together while watching the cornpone country music TV show Hee-Haw. There was something in the passing notes that banjo picker Roy Clark played that clicked in Mitchell's mind, and he quickly ran to a piano to work out the song's anticipatory intro.

In Royal Studios in September-October '71, Willie Mitchell and Al Jackson Jr. pulled the rest of the music together – but maybe not quick enough for Green. One day, having asked after progress on the song, the singer grabbed a pad and locked himself in the studio control room. Fifteen minutes later, he emerged with a fully formed lyric: words that served not only as a romantic plea but also a call for reconciliation after the riots and assassinations of the late '60s and the unrest that had kicked off the new decade. "Let's stay together," as Green explained his lyric later. "What you doing? If you burn ➢

Bud Lee Picture Maker, Getty (2), Hi Records Archives (2)





Free spirit: (clockwise from left) Green bares all in a cotton field, 1971; 21-year-old Al in Memphis, 1967; the soul singer as guitarist, 1970; Green with producer Willie Mitchell at the desk in Royal Studios; the Royal exterior, 1320 South Lauderdale St, Memphis.

"The fella who was always alone": (clockwise, from left) Green on BBC's In Concert, 1973; Let's Stay Together backing vocalists Rhodes, Chalmers & Rhodes; Hi Rhythm (from left) Leroy Hodges, Charles Hodges, Howard Grimes, Archie Turner, Teenie Hodges; Green and singer Ann Peebles; Green with (left) Three Dog Night and Blood Sweat & Tears' Jerry Fisher, 1972; Al feels the heat.

"HE STARTED SINGING, AND I HEARD THAT VOICE AND I SAID, 'AH-HA! LOOK WHAT I FOUND HERE!'"
WILLIE MITCHELL

up the town, we're going to have to build it again."

Eventually, after Green's flounce in his Corvette and subsequent vocal breakthrough, they cut a keeper. To enhance the atmosphere, a studio audience was recruited from the street drinkers congregated on what's now called Willie Mitchell Boulevard.

"Al says, 'Why don't you go and get four or five gallons of wine – let's bring these people in the studio,'" Mitchell told documentary filmmaker Robert Mugge. "So we brought about 50 people in here, all the winos. They're drinkin' wine, layin' on the floor while we were cutting the record… We'd all tell them to be quiet. If you'll notice on the *Let's Stay Together* album, you'll hear a lot of noise in the background… it's the winos."

Although Al Jackson had guided the track with his empathetic drumming, Mitchell directed Howard Grimes to add extra percussion. "After we cut Let's Stay Together, Willie said it needed conga drums," recalled Grimes in his 2021 memoir Timekeeper. "'The conga drums gonna put the balls on this motherfucker. It's gonna put elephant balls on it.'"

Mitchell mouthed the beat he wanted and instructed Grimes to get in the pocket. "I want the conga drum to dance," he told him.

"I thought, 'How the hell am I gonna do that?' recalled Grimes. "I remembered a commercial for Budweiser they put out at Christmas with the Clydesdale horses. They'd clop along and their heads bobbed up and down. I could see those horses in my mind's vision on the beat Willie wanted. I played that sound and Willie said, 'That's it, now we gon' cut this motherfucker.' He rolled the tape. He played it back and called me in. Willie said, 'It's a monster! It's a motherfuckin' hit!'"

Yet there was one crucial element still to be added. Rhodes, Chalmers & Rhodes were a troupe of backup singers comprising Charlie Chalmers – a rock'n'roll sax man attached to Hi from its early days – plus sisters Sandra and Donna Rhodes, a pair of local country singers whose parents, Dusty & Dot, had been signed to Sun Records in the '50s. Their judicious support, clinging closely to Green's lead, only added to the song's aura of aching intimacy.

"Most people don't know they were white," laughed Leroy Hodges, "and wouldn't believe you if you told them that either."

GREEN'S MUSIC – UNDERSCORED WITH LONGING – grew out of an inner life marked by feelings of being apart from the world. "I'm kind of a loner, in a way, because of the fact that I've always been alone," he said in a 1972 interview. "I always wanted to have a lot of friends. At lunchtime, in fourth or fifth grade, you know how kids would trade sandwiches? I never did do this – not because I didn't want to, but because I was the fella who was always alone."

Yet his demeanour in the studio seemed increasingly confident. Green's kinetic manner at the mike – talking to himself, joking with everyone – buoyed the band, and guided their performances. "Al motivates me when I'm working with him," said Charles Hodges. "When you walk in the room you can feel the energy around him. That's the way Al is."

"When he first opened his mouth, you could feel the vibe," said Howard Grimes, who often took his rhythmic cues from Green's physicality behind the mike. "The handclap, the timing, the feel, everything was there. It wasn't never no problem to come up with anything, because he always had the pattern already laid out."

As Green's songwriting moved in manifold directions on *Let's Stay Together*, Hi Rhythm was ready to follow him anywhere: from the blues grit of La-La For You to the gospel laze of Old Time Lovin', the almost baroque pop of Judy to the country funk of It Ain't No Fun To Me. In the hands of Mitchell and his men, genres, styles and sounds melded seamlessly.

"See, we never just straight did R&B. It was always R&B and pop," said Teenie Hodges. "That was from learning, playing with Willie [in clubs], with us playing ballads and standard songs, even jazz instrumentals, all night long."

A perfect example was Green and Hi Rhythm's epic interpretation of The Bee Gees' How Can You Mend A Broken Heart: a masterpiece of mood, drawn out to nearly six and half minutes. Mitchell instructed the band to imagine they were sitting by a river, a forest across the water, with "all this music coming out of the forest and floating across the river, kind of delayed."

As Green (and Neil Young) biographer Jimmy McDonough noted: "The Bee Gees' version is a classic expression of angst-ridden youth, Green's is something deeper – he gives the lyric the weight, an ancient screed chiselled on tablets excavated from deep within some pyramid. Hearing Al sing the line, 'I was never told about the sorrow' stops the clock."

FOR MUCH OF THE 1960s AND INTO THE EARLY '70s, the sound of soul music had been set by Stax Records, located just a stone's throw from Hi. Willie Mitchell wanted to challenge that hegemony.

"The Stax sound was real open and wide and I tried to get Hi Records to be more settled down – in fact, I was trying to go pop with it," said the producer. "I didn't want it to be black people's sound. I wanted it to be black people's sound *and* white people's sound."

Key, ultimately, to unlocking that ambition would be the sophisticated horn and string arrangements of Mitchell's younger brother James. He'd be hailed as a genius by the Hi band, but in truth it took a while for his older brother to acknowledge his talent. Willie had turned for charts to his old mentor, big band leader Onzie Horne, but that was about to change.

"We talked him into using James because Onzie wrote old style," remembered Teenie Hodges. For *Let's Stay Together*, "Willie was trying to get the violins out of New York and Detroit, and he couldn't book them," recalled Teenie. "He wanted to release the album, so I asked him, 'Doesn't Memphis have a symphony? Any symphony should be able to play anything that's written right? If James writes it, the Memphis symphony can play it.' And that's when James started writing."

In the mid '90s, James – who died in 2000 – described a contentious relationship with Willie. "He's my brother, we fight all the time. But we're tight. Really, the only time Willie got mad is when I would have something that he couldn't understand; he's got to understand what you're doing before he'll put it down on a track."

James Mitchell would chart the atmospheric strings on *Let's Stay Together* – the ethereal swells on How Can You Mend A Broken Heart, the fluttering filigrees in Judy – but it was never easy gauging his brother's expectations. "[Willie's] not ever going to let you know what he's thinking," said James, "how he feels about the tune or whatever he's looking for. He's looking for a certain thing, a certain feel. A subliminal thing."

That "subliminal thing" extended to the mix. As was the case with Let's Stay Together, Mitchell often took Green's singles across town to mix at John Fry's Ardent Studios. Working with young Ardent engineer Terry Manning, Mitchell taught a masterclass at the console.

"Sometimes he would turn me loose for a little bit and say, 'Let's see what you can do,'" recalled Manning. "He would listen to what I mixed and say, 'You know what? It doesn't move me.' I'm thinking, Well, I've EQ'd it, I've cleaned it up, I've done all the right technical things…"

Mitchell would move Manning aside and take over. He would

Hi Records Archives, Bud Lee Picture Maker, Getty (2), Fat Possum Records, Howard Grimes Archives

GREEN SHOOTS

And (mostly) scores. All of Al's Hi albums, rated by **Andrew Male.**

Green Is Blues

★★★

(Hi, 1969)

For his first collaboration with producer Willie Mitchell and the Hi Rhythm Section, Green does Motown (My Girl) Sam Cooke (Talk To Me) and Bobby Bland (I Stand Accused) with only the startling opening track, One Woman, pointing the way forward; a seductive, melancholy tale of moral duplicity in which Al plays both angel and devil.

Gets Next To You

★★★★

(Hi, 1971)

Two roads diverge. For much of Green's second Hi effort he is tearing up standards (Light My Fire; Driving Wheel) and getting down to muscular Southern soul. But it's the testifying rework of The Temptations' I Can't Get Next To You and Tired Of Being Alone's sweet physical pleading that points towards a soul road less travelled.

Let's Stay Together

★★★★★

(Hi, 1972)

Green's first emotionally autobiographical work, caught between the personal and the political (the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the collapse of the Black Panthers). The title track and his cover of The Bee Gees' How Can You Mend A Broken Heart capture that pain perfectly, anger dampened down into introspection.

I'm Still In Love With You

★★★★★

(Hi, 1972)

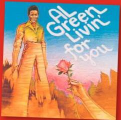
Next came the sell-out gigs, the women, and an ever-growing tension between angel-and-devil Al. The Hi Rhythm guys saw it and kept him in check with deep, slow, seductive grooves. Audrey Williams, Hank's ex, introduced him to For The Good Times, and a new elegant Country-politan melancholy was brought into the mix as well.

Call Me

★★★★★

(Hi, 1973)

His masterpiece. Al's inner struggles intensified (You Ought To Be With Me is addressed directly to God), the country covers doubled, and Al's double-tracked delivery seemingly fluctuates between secular pleasure and religious fear (Jesus Is Waiting), while the sound ascended to a kind of hypnotic exercise in multi-dimensional aural bliss.



Livin' For You

★★★

(Hi, 1973)

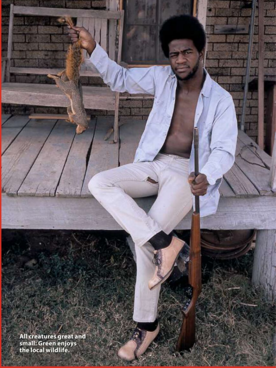
As the live shows became more euphoric, something turned strange in the studio. Born again, but running from God, Green sounds emotionally lost, alternating between a deep weariness (the title track) and creepy paranoia (Beware) while the band sound utterly exhausted, only really coming alive on the playfully off-the-cuff groove of Let's Get Married.

Explores Your Mind

★★★

(Hi, 1974)

The in-the-pocket proto-disco of Sha-La-La (Make Me Happy); the haunted baptismal funk of Take Me To The River and the sweet gospel gratitude of God Bless Our Love. It all starts so well. But constant touring meant there was little else left in the tank. It's never bad, *per se*, although the funk-by-numbers of One Nite Stand comes pretty close.



All creatures great and small: Green enjoys the local wildlife.

Al Green Is Love

★★★★

(Hi, 1975)

Recorded following the suicide of his girlfriend Mary Woodson, this is a curiously unsettling record about "the elevation of the mind" which slides from L-O-V-E's soaring declaration of higher-power devotion to the eerily enigmatic The Love Sermon and There Is Love, where Green chillingly declares, "I know what Santa Claus is about/Glad I never seen him."

Full Of Fire

★★★

(Hi, 1976)

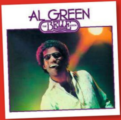
Another schizophrenic LP from a time when Green was struggling with depression. There is doubt and regret bound up in love songs like There's No Way but the split is best typified by the pivot from the crawling, paranoid mysticism of That's The Way It Is to the light, coltish jazz of Always. The centre could not hold.

Have A Good Time

★★

(Hi, 1976)

Deep into religion, Green was preaching on-stage and scaring off fans. In the studio, Willie Mitchell, still reeling from the murder of M.G.'s' drummer Al Jackson, started to dabble with disco strings and horns. The Hi Rhythm crew are barely detectable, their nerve and identity gone. It's a sad end to Green and Mitchell's working partnership.



The Belle Album

★★★★★

(Hi, 1977)

Recorded in his own eight-track studio, with a loose team of semi-pros and the synthetic strings of the Polyphonic Orchestron, *The Belle Album* is a weird, rough stylistic rebirth. Playing guitar throughout, Green sounds humbled, discovering his spiritual and country soul in a series of spontaneous born-in-the-studio communions with the Lord.

Truth N' Time

★★★

(Hi, 1978)

Whatever strange magic was in the studio for *The Belle Album* had mostly deserted Green by the time of this follow-up. Aside from the tight Carwash funk of Wait Here (based on The Book Of Job and a leftover from its predecessor) his final Hi recording is but a 26-minute sleepwalk through old Hi styles with little fire or purpose.

tweak a few elements, add a little more punch to the bass, and locate the sweet spot in the sound. When he got it right, he would shuffle his shoulders, shimmy a little. "There," he told Manning. "I can *feel* it now."

IF ANYONE OTHER THAN WILLIE MITCHELL HAD HAD their say, Let's Stay Together may not have become Al Green's transformative hit. London Records, the company that distributed Hi, was unenthusiastic about its chances as a single; even Green remained uncertain, fearing the track was "too soft". But Mitchell insisted, and the song was released in November of 1971.

As Mitchell would later claim, "it was put out on Monday and [went] gold on Thursday." Certainly, it was an instant R&B chart smash, then moved to the Hot 100, where it stayed for 16 weeks, nine of them at the top, ultimately giving Green his one and only Number 1 pop record.

Released at the end of January 1972, the *Let's Stay Together* album would fully confirm Green's soul superstardom, which he cemented with another hit LP that fall, *I'm Still In Love With You*.

By 1973 – and with the release of two more classic LPs that year, *Call Me* and *Livin' For You* – Green was at the zenith of his career. Yet despite the fame and fortune, he was deeply unhappy, beginning to drift away from music and toward religion. That shift began with an epiphany on the road, following a performance at Disneyland, where God spoke to him in his hotel room.

"I had a born-again awakening… in the Coach'n'Four Motel in Anaheim, California," said Green. "And I never been the same since. I was changed about or something."

Green ran to his father, who was travelling with him. "My daddy asked me, 'What's the matter?' I say, 'Look at my hands … look at my feet… they're glowing – can't you see it?'"

Then, he heard the voice of God: "He said, 'I want you to come to me. *Come to me*.' But I got to sing these songs and please all these people.' 'You don't have to do anything, Al. Come to me, and I'll make everything OK.'"

Green's fervour became more intense in the wake of a tragic 1974 incident involving his girlfriend Mary Woodson, who attacked the singer at his home with a pot of scalding-hot grits, causing serious burns to his body. Shortly after attacking Green, Woodson – a married mother of four with a history of mental problems – retreated to a bedroom and shot herself dead with Green's own .38-calibre revolver.

Subsequently, Green would pursue a spiritual path, opening his own Memphis church, the Full Gospel Tabernacle, in 1976. That same year, the newly ordained Rev. Green would record a final album, *Have A Good Time*, with Willie Mitchell and Hi Rhythm.

Green then left his longtime creative home for his own newly-built American Music studio in South Memphis, where he would self-produce the spiritually resonant masterpiece *The Belle Album* in 1977. His Hi label swansong *Truth N' Time* came out the following year. After that, Green abandoned secular music entirely for a decade, finding comfort and considerable success as a gospel artist.

Though Mitchell and Green would reunite – once in 1985 and again in the early-'00s for a pair of secular albums, prior to the producer's passing in 2010 – *Let's Stay Together* still stands as the peak, or maybe the first great peak, of their historic union.

A HALF CENTURY ON FROM *LET'S STAY TOGETHER*, AL Green's place in the soul pantheon is secure. His presence in the current musical landscape is rather more spectral.

"MY DADDY ASKED ME, 'WHAT'S THE MATTER?' I SAY, 'LOOK AT MY HANDS… LOOK AT MY FEET… THEY'RE GLOWING.'" AL GREEN

Highway to heaven: Rev Green at Full Gospel Tabernacle, Memphis; (top) in mid-prayer, 2004.

Although he's played a smattering of live dates in recent years, it's been a decade since his last full-scale tour. It's been 14 years since the most recent album, the Grammy-winning *Lay It Down*, co-produced by The Roots' Amir 'Questlove' Thompson, and featuring collaborations with a new generation of R&B and pop artists, like Anthony Hamilton and John Legend.

In the fall of 2018, Green did emerge to release a one-off single for Amazon's 'Produced By' series, a cover of Freddy Fender's '70s country hit Before The Next Teardrop Falls, recorded by Grammy-winner Matt Ross-Spang. Efforts by Ross-Spang and Fat Possum (current owners of the Hi Records catalogue) to persuade Green to follow it up have been fruitless so far.

"I think because we did Before The Next Teardrop Falls, he was intrigued with the idea of maybe doing some more country stuff," said Ross-Spang. Fat Possum's Bruce Watson noted that the label "has been trying to get Al to make a record for a long time. I know he's been writing songs. Whenever Al Green wants to make a record, we're ready."

These days, Green can still be found most Sundays leading services at his Full Gospel Tabernacle in the Whitehaven section of Memphis. The church's congregation is spirited, if relatively small – and one that's historically swelled with the tourist seasons, as fans and curious visitors come from all over to see Green preach and sing.

On the occasion of the church's 40th anniversary in 2016, Green conducted his last in-depth interview with this MOJO reporter (through his church secretary, Green declined an interview request for this article).

Sitting in his offices, beneath a gold framed photo of himself – in all his bejewelled and bare-chested '70s glory – Green seemed content with his many achievements and accolades. An 11-time Grammy winner, Green is member of the Rock and Roll, Gospel and Songwriters' Halls of Fame, and a recipient of a 2014 Kennedy Center Honor, handed to him by then President Barack Obama.

"I done did a lot of stuff, man," said Green, chuckling. "I'm not hankering for anything any more, not really."

Now aged 75, Green still preaches from the pulpit. The subjects of his sermons vary from week to week, but the essence of his message remains consistent with the lyrics of his most famous song.

"I preach about everyone staying together, staying strong in good times and bad," he said. "What I sing, what I preach, is about love in the end – about finding love, and keeping it, however you can." Ⓜ

Original Willie Mitchell, James Mitchell and Hi Rhythm interviews courtesy of Robert Gordon. Additional material from Soul Survivor by Jimmy McDonough and Timekeeper by Howard Grimes and Preston Lauterbach. Special thanks to Robert Gordon, Bruce Watson at Fat Possum, and Matt Ross-Spang.

Bud Lee Picture Maker, Jim Weber/Commercial Appeal, Alamy

MOJO PRESENTS

When her Americana musical, Hadestown, exploded on Broadway, songwriting took a back row seat. Now ANAÏS MITCHELL is re-finding her muse, her childhood self, and a bagful of tunes in backwoods Vermont. "It's not that cool," she tells GRAYSON HAVER CURRIN, "but I don't have the energy to be cool any more."

Photography by JAY SANSONE

ANAÏS MITCHELL KNEW BETTER THAN TO TAKE another job.

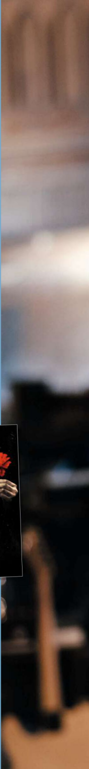
It was June 2020, three months since she and her husband Noah had fled New York for the sheep farm where she grew up in middle Vermont, five hours due north. A week after the move, she had given birth to their second daughter, Rosetta. So when the invitation arrived to join a long-distance consortium of songwriters who penned and posted a song a day, she already knew she was too busy. But she also somehow knew she had to say yes.

"That's not how I roll – I take *years* to write," exclaims Mitchell. "But as someone who second-guesses and overthinks things, I found it wildly healing. The exercise of having to say 'Yes' to whatever idea you have and getting out of the way was incredible."

It was high time Mitchell got out of her own way. Nearly a decade had passed since she'd released her last solo album, 2012's *Young Man In America*. Since then, her career had moved in an entirely different direction. More than 10 years in development, her Americana musical Hadestown, a poignant rendering of the doomed mythological romance of Orpheus and Eurydice, hit Broadway in 2019. It earned a staggering eight Tonys and a Grammy, and Time magazine proclaimed Mitchell one of 2020's 100 most influential people.

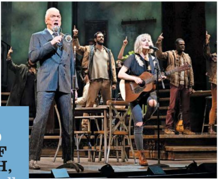
The dizzying success and schedule made her question if she'd ever make another singer-songwriter record, despite her five solo LPs, membership of folk trio Bonny Light Horseman and recent contributions to Justin Vernon and Aaron Dessner's Big Red Machine collective. "If I tried to write another song," she says, "I felt like I was cheating on Hadestown."

But Mitchell's first of two week-long stints in the song-a-day club (co-founded by Leonard Cohen's son, Adam, and producer Phil Weinrobe) helped her not only generate new ideas but prompted her to finish fragments she'd left untouched for years. Her new self-titled, self-assured album represents the reintroduction of a master songwriter. ➢



Have guitar, will travel: Anaïs Mitchell at Dreamland Recording Studios in upstate New York, December 2020; (inset) her award-winning Hadestown musical.

Meeting the mystery: (clockwise) Mitchell on the Lower East Side, NYC, November 2021; winning one of eight Tonys for Hadestown, 2019; on-stage with 'Hades' Patrick Page, 2019; Mitchell's new, self-titled LP.



"WE BUILT THIS WHOLE LIFE IN NEW YORK, AND I DIDN'T INTEND TO LEAVE. THERE WAS THIS BRIEF FEELING OF ANGST, AND THEN, 'OH, FUCK, THIS IS AMAZING.'" Anaïs Mitchell

< "At its best for me, songwriting feels like a practice – bringing yourself and meeting the mystery," Mitchell tells MOJO. "There was something about doing a song a day that felt like meeting that mystery. I was allowing songs to come from the place that isn't the conscious mind, that isn't results-oriented. I would love to live that way more."

ANAÏS MITCHELL'S PARENTS MET IN college in the '60s, then joined that moment's countercultural diaspora – they hitchhiked to California and enlisted in the Summer of Love. "I won't say they were Deadheads," Mitchell laughs, "but they experienced the early Dead."

A decade later, they returned to Vermont and built an idyllic homestead, steeping their kids in Quaker self-reliance. Mitchell's father was a novelist, so bookshelves overflowed; her mother was a government official who encouraged travel, even shipping Anaïs to Europe and Japan. Her grandparents, who moved to the farm to help raise the family, kept her current with television, which her parents refused to own. She played guitar, inspired by her parents' records – Dylan, Cohen, Joni Mitchell – and the female singer-songwriters of the '90s – Ani DiFranco, Dar Williams, Tori Amos – and won prestigious songwriting awards before enrolling at nearby Middlebury College.

The 2004 re-election of George W. Bush triggered an artistic awakening, Mitchell's frustrations funnelling into Hadestown, a complex piece of musical theatre that grappled with issues of despair and hope, updated for the fraught political moment. With a troupe of friends, she careened around Vermont in a silver school bus, presenting the embryonic work. "Maybe here you feel cowed by the critical community," she told Vogue a decade later, on the verge of the show's arrival in New York. "There's something about being in this very free and innocent space of Vermont, that's just like: 'Let's make this thing!'"

For the better part of a decade, Mitchell the songwriter and Mitchell the playwright appeared on parallel and manageable tracks. She released increasingly intricate albums of hyper-literate folk rock while refining and expanding Hadestown, which became a 20-track concept LP, abetted by Justin Vernon (and Ani DiFranco), in 2010. Then, in 2012, with director Rachel Chavkin, she started a new stage version, which premiered Off Broadway in 2016 and ascended to Broadway proper in 2019. But the subsequently relentless popularity of its jump-up mix of roots and show-tune sensibilities cut two ways. "It got to the point where I couldn't even read a book," says Mitchell, sighing. "It was hard to enjoy life, because it felt like, 'I've got to work on this thing.'"

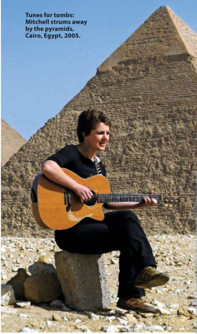
Mitchell had mostly extricated herself from the day-to-day operation of Hadestown before the pandemic prompted her family's flight from New York, but Vermont added creative impetus. When Rosetta slept, Mitchell would squirrel away in the tiny room where her grandmother had stowed quilting fabric, running a fan to fend off summer heat. She found her grandmother's old letters stuffed in boxes, plus her own tear-stained high school journals. As the memories raced in, she penned Revenant, a song about the way your past, present, and future interact as you age, reshaping the way you see yourself. After a decade of thinking about other characters in Hadestown, she was mining her own story.

"All these objects I remembered, it was unearthing a lot," says Mitchell, who turned 39 just after returning to Vermont. "Even encountering my parents again now that I have two kids, I just reconnected."

As the week of the song-a-day challenge progressed, her constraints prompted Mitchell to reconsider what might count as a song. She'd long considered singing about her love for spaces not mediated by technology. Out of that came Real World, a guileless ode to human contact – even wiping a child's snotty nose – that spilled out in a single sitting, its few brief stanzas poised on a featherlight guitar line for 100 seconds.

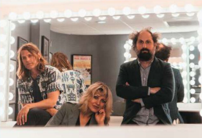
"It's so heart-on-the-sleeve that you're like, 'Did I really just put that on the record?'" says Mitchell, animatedly. "It's not that cool, but I don't have the energy to be cool any more. I can't wait until

Toby Tenenbaum, Getty, Alamy (3), Nolan Knight



Tunes for tombs: Mitchell strums away by the pyramids, Cairo, Egypt, 2005.

Talk of the 'Town: Mitchell performing in Burlington, Vermont, October 11, 2019; (below) Bonny Light Horseman, with Eric D. Johnson (left) and Josh Kaufman.



I am 60 and don't have any fucks left."

This unexpected bounty of songs begged to be recorded, but how? In 2018, Mitchell had formed Bonny Light Horseman, a casual trio with producer and instrumentalist Josh Kaufman and Fruit Bats leader Eric D. Johnson. They gently updated traditional folk tunes with lush harmonies and incisive textures, capturing an effortless chemistry in a series of short sessions.

"Making music with Josh and Eric, I felt myself coming back to life, like I had an IV of liquids," Mitchell says, admitting she once became so dehydrated from toiling on Hadestown she had to be taken to the hospital for an actual IV. "And it taught me about what could happen with a live approach to recording."

Wanting to revisit that feeling, she shipped 18 demos to Kaufman, who had become a confidant. She wanted to record them soon, she says, so she didn't have time to fret about what fans of Hadestown might expect next from its creator. Kaufman booked a week in December 2020 at Dreamland studio, a 19th-century church in upstate New York, and gathered a small group of trusted collaborators including percussionist J.T. Bates and saxophonist Michael Lewis.

"It felt like these buddies getting together, so she was almost just telling us these stories in a conversation as she was singing," remembers Kaufman. "You can hear it in the way people are playing with patience. You would be quiet, let a thought resonate, and then make a sound."

BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL IN Vermont's Addison County, Mitchell and a boyfriend would visit a reservoir to hike and party, rural kids looking to entertain themselves. The scene underpins Backroads, the new album's gently chameleonic tune about the unbridled joy of adolescent innocence and the complications that come when it ends. But when she finished the song, Mitchell realised she couldn't remember the name or location of that wild spot in the woods. She texted the ex to ask, and she began hiking there, in an area called The Watershed, with Noah, Rosetta, and her oldest daughter, Ramona. The field where she once cavorted had returned to forest.

The setting and its evocative name made Mitchell reconsider just how much had changed. She was physically farther from Hadestown than she'd ever imagined, unable just to drop in on a production; the show carried on largely without her. And just when she and Noah had finally been able to afford a larger New York apartment, the pandemic helped drive them out. She had obtained the very things she had worked so hard to get, then let them go. This was her watershed.

"There's that haiku: 'Since my barn burned down, I have a better view of the rising moon,'" says Mitchell, paraphrasing a 17th-century work by Mizuta Masahide. "The wanting, the striving, the struggle, the years of whatever, and then that thing is done. That's actually kind of beautiful."

Mitchell took these sentiments to the piano she's had for nearly 20 years, though she's only now learning to play – by mastering Nightswimming by R.E.M., four bars at a time. She called the result Watershed, and made it the last song on *Anaïs Mitchell*.

"We built this whole life in New York, and I didn't intend to leave. There was this brief feeling of angst, and then, 'Oh, fuck, this is amazing,'" Mitchell says, inhaling slowly as if to emphasise the cool country air. "To be up here and have space to look back feel like a clearing. And now there's a whole new terrain up ahead." Ⓜ

HELL YES

The pick of Anaïs on LP, by **Grayson Haver Currin**.

ANAÏS MITCHELL
Hadestown
(Righteous Babe, 2010)

Made on a budget long before Broadway, this intricate indie interpretation of Greek mythology hinges on a pair of simpatico voices – Mitchell and Bon Iver's Justin Vernon. The story's romantic woes remain forever relevant, as power and politics still overrun the purest hearts.

ANAÏS MITCHELL
Young Man In America
(Wilderland, 2012)

Lullabies that yearn, eulogies that sting, shuffles that twist: Mitchell's fifth – and, for a decade, final – solo album is a cataract of audacious ideas that never quite cohere, as if built in a *Hadestown* hangover. The title track, though, is a wonder of gothic Americana.

BONNY LIGHT HORSEMAN
Bonny Light Horseman
(37d03d, 2020)

This trio's transfixing debut doubles as one of their generation's most vivid re-imaginings of old Anglo-folk idioms. Whether on a narcotised Blackwaterside or a hymn for John Henry, Mitchell and Eric D. Johnson suggest tongue and groove, elements forever waiting to interlock.

ANAÏS MITCHELL
Anaïs Mitchell
(2022, BMG)

Informed by the character development of *Hadestown* and imbued with the effortless grace of Bonny Light Horseman, these 10 magnetic songs introduce a Mitchell with little to prove but much to share. She tucks a lifetime of lessons inside a disarming but sage half-hour.

Reflected

When **PINK FLOYD** perfected Echoes in late 1971, it was a transformational epiphany – an emerging vision of a successful future for the band. Fifty years and some serious woodshedding later, **NICK MASON'S SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS** are taking it on the road. Time for MOJO to dive into the elaborate creation, and re-creation, of a masterpiece. "It's fucking long," discovers **TOM DOYLE**. "It goes on forever, mate."

Picture by **AMALIE R. ROTHSCHILD**.

Amalie R. Rothschild

Glory

Reverberation game: Pink Floyd going deep, Fillmore East, New York, September 27, 1970.

IN A REHEARSAL SPACE IN NORTH LONDON, NICK MASON SITS BEHIND HIS DRUM kit, listening to himself shouting 50 years ago. As he builds up a tom-tom tattoo to accompany a familiar echoing bassline, his mangled, pitched-down voice, recorded back in 1971 (and now sampled), dementedly barks through the PA: "I'm going to cut you into little pieces…"

Around him, his Saucerful Of Secrets band – trading in '67-'72 Pink Floyd since 2018 – kick into the proto-headbanger crescendo of One Of These Days, the opening track from 1971's *Meddle*. After the song culminates in a flurry of cymbal and guitar noise, MOJO wonders aloud: isn't Mason tempted to set up a microphone and re-enact his vocal role live?

"Yes, I am tempted, and we have looked at that, and we might do that," he gently laughs, sitting behind drums whose shells are illustrated with a cartoonish Native American warrior-cum-biker figure and emblazoned with the playful legend "Mighty Mason".

More *Meddle* follows, with a confident stride through Fearless, with Saucers singer/guitarist Gary Kemp and bassist/singer Guy Pratt replicating those double-tracked David Gilmour harmonies, ending with a blast of haunting audio, as the field recording of '70s Liverpool fans chanting You'll Never Walk Alone resounds through the practice room.

Four years ago, Pink Floyd's redundant drummer – bored and twiddling his thumbs at home for more than two decades – first assembled Saucerful Of Secrets, at the suggestion of guitarist and former Blockhead Lee Harris (the five-piece line-up is completed by onetime Orb keyboardist Dom Beken). For Mason, it was an exercise in getting back to playing music, while paying tribute to the founding era of his former band.

Although their set remains Syd Barrett-heavy, Saucerful Of Secrets are now nudging the limits of their self-imposed remit to play anything and everything from the Floyd catalogue before '73's monumental *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. Next today, they unveil for MOJO their version of the dreamy Burning Bridges from '72's *Obscured By Clouds*.

"I don't think we ever played that live," Mason says of Floyd past. "There's probably some nerd out there who will produce evidence that we did."

"It's a beauty," adds Gary Kemp. "The funny thing about Burning Bridges is you can't play it slow enough. Because there's playing music slowly, and then there's playing music *as slow as Pink Floyd*."

Tantalisingly, Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets (to give them their full billing) have chosen to call their upcoming 2022 American and European jaunt The Echoes Tour. The 23-minute-long Echoes, the multi-movement ambient rock classic that side two of *Meddle* – and pointed the way forward for Floyd as they fully left the '60s and Syd's influence) behind – was notably missing from early Saucers sets. So, why decide to tackle Echoes now?

"I think it was just too much of a mouthful to kick off with on the first attempt," says Mason. "Echoes is such a sort of piece in its own right."

From its signature sonar pings onwards, Echoes was and remains a revelatory composition, moving through atmospheric introduction, chromatic riffing, David Gilmour and Rick Wright's close harmonising, a funky Hammond workout and five whole minutes of avant-noise, before reaching a climax reprising its various themes. No wonder, perhaps, that Mason and Saucerful Of Secrets considered it daunting to replicate.

Today, the band choose not to play their work-in-progress Echoes for MOJO, concerned that the precise details of their new version will leak too soon. This slight trepidation can perhaps be explained by the fact that Nick Mason views *Meddle* "as one of the critical albums" for Pink Floyd.

"Something like *Ummagumma* or *Atom Heart Mother* were interesting," he states. "But they weren't part of the forward motion."

IT'S EARLY 1971 AND "FORWARD MOTION", as far as Pink Floyd are concerned, is proving elusive. The four members of the band are in the Studio Three control room at Abbey Road, talking to a reporter from the BBC1 24 Hours magazine programme about the phenomenon of vinyl bootleg albums. They look distinctly unimpressed as they listen to a warped, lo-fi live version of Atom Heart Mother from an illicit pressing titled *Pinky*. "Compared with studio recordings, it is disgusting," fumes Floyd manager Steve O'Rourke.

"Their reactions weren't perhaps so surprising," notes the unnamed reporter in voiceover. "Producing pop music today is sophisticated and expensive." The footage cuts to David Gilmour, Roger Waters, Rick Wright and Nick Mason in the live room, working on their latest composition: an early draft of the introduction to Echoes. All four are lost in concentration and give the impression of being deeply stoned.

Not so, says John Leckie, who – though unseen – was in the control room when the film was shot. The future record producer, who was in 1971 an Abbey Road staff engineer, remembers that for a "head" band, Floyd were remarkably drug-free.

"They never got stoned," Leckie says. "It was all booze, really. Brandies and Southern Comfort and tequilas were the big thing. You'd never get a joint going or anything."

The 21-year-old Leckie was a ➢

"The challenge is, do we play Echoes exactly as it was on the record? No, thank you." NICK MASON

Andrew Cotterill, John Rettie

Forward motion: Nick Mason on a roll at Leeds University, February 28, 1970; (above) clips from the BBC 24 Hours piece on the vinyl bootleg craze, featuring 'Bootleg King' Jeffrey Collins (top left), unimpressed Floyd manager Steve O'Rourke, and the band in Abbey Road making "sophisticated and expensive" pop music.

Dish Wallahs

Over three and a bit years, Nick Mason's early-Floyd flag-wavers have turned cynics into converts. "We took the pomposity out of the music," they tell **TOM DOYLE**.

ON PAPER, the idea looked fairly ludicrous: the septuagenarian Nick Mason revisiting the early days of Pink Floyd with erstwhile members of Spandau Ballet and The Blockheads. But, through their attention to detail and on-stage verve, Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets have been a resounding success.

"It would sound too depressing to say I had very low expectations, because it was not really that," Mason tells MOJO. "I just wasn't sure whether it would interest people."

"What's lovely is it's Pink Floyd when they were a pop group," states Guy Pratt. "Before it was this vast, faceless obelisk."

"We took the pomposity out of the music," reckons Gary Kemp. "We gave it a little bit more fun, a little bit more edge, a little bit more anarchy here and there."

Even those who were sniffy about Kemp stepping into the shoes of Syd Barrett have been forced to check their snobbery. "Listen, man, I've spent the whole of my life with people being sniffy about me," he hoots. "They have this impression that I just sit at home doing kind of rather thin Nile Rodgers riffs and listening to Bowie records."

Nonetheless, Pratt admits that, sometimes in their early gigs of 2018, the Saucers were often dangerously winging it. "The first few shows, we hadn't done Atom Heart Mother," the bassist says. "Then we put it in the set in Amsterdam. About a third of the way through it, I suddenly thought, 'What the hell are we doing? This is incredibly ambitious' (*laughs*)."

All attest to experiencing some properly transcendent moments on-stage, particularly at Den Atelier in Luxembourg on September 9, 2018. "When we did A Saucerful Of Secrets," Pratt recalls, "the entire audience sang the vocal part. That was just extraordinary."

Mason's venture has met with the approval of both David Gilmour and Roger Waters, the latter even making a surprise live appearance on-stage with the Saucers at the Beacon Theatre in New York on April 18, 2019, to sing Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun.

"I'd rung him and asked him if he'd do it and I heard absolutely nothing," Mason says. "And then two days later, he rang me to say he'd left his phone in a taxi, so he hadn't been in touch. So, we actually more or less put it together on the night."

"It was incredibly last minute," says Pratt. "He didn't soundcheck or anything. And it was quite funny, because I remember we just had to have a huddle and a chat about it. Nick was saying, 'Oh, you know, Roger does it this way when he does it.' We were like, 'Yeah, well, we're doing it our way.' And he was brilliant."

"It took a long time to get through the track because he was walking around on-stage a lot with his arms in the air," laughs Kemp. "But he was great."

"He actually left the stage before the third verse," Lee Harris remembers. "Guy had to get him and go, 'There's another verse you've forgotten.'"

For 2022, Saucerful Of Secrets have a mammoth 84-date schedule in place for The Echoes Tour. Beyond that, MOJO wonders if there's any chance that they might consider expanding their repertoire into post-1972 Pink Floyd?

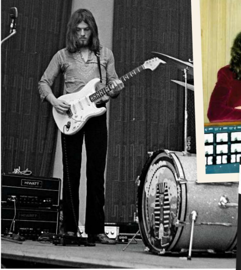
"Well, as soon as you start treading on Money and Comfortably Numb and so on, you enter a world of, 'Well, David didn't do it quite like that,'" Mason points out.

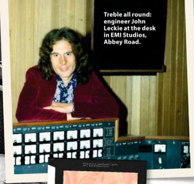
Lee Harris, however, wonders aloud whether there might be other neglected corners of the wider Floyd landscape into which Saucerful Of Secrets might venture. "There are pieces like Shine On… (Parts VI-IX) that don't really get played by the other guys. You could play that as a five-piece easily.

"I mean, I think it could be interesting to do *Dark Side*…, but when it was Eclipse, before they'd actually turned it into the album. If you were doing The Great Gig In The Sky without the singer, as they did, where it was just a lot of Hammond, you're taking it back to the music. But, y'know, we've got about 90 gigs to get out of the way first."

"LISTEN, MAN, I'VE SPENT THE WHOLE OF MY LIFE WITH PEOPLE BEING SNIFFY ABOUT ME."
GARY KEMP

Careful with that axe: Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets, October 15, 2021 (from above) Mason, Gary Kemp, the full ensemble (from left) Kemp, Lee Harris, Mason, Guy Pratt, Dom Beken.





Treble all round: engineer John Leckie at the desk in EMI Studios, Abbey Road.

➤ huge Pink Floyd fan who at the start of '71 had turned down the chance to work with John Lennon on *Imagine*, preferring to engineer what became *Meddle*. He recalls Echoes beginning life as a series of unconnected pieces all titled Nothing: "I said to Nick Mason, 'What's this track called?' and he said, 'Oh, it's nothing. Call it Nothing.' So, when they did the next song, I said, 'I suppose this is Nothing number two?' He said, 'That's right.' And we kind of went on."

As it evolved, the gargantuan track became Nothing Parts 1-24, before subsequent tape boxes were labelled The Son Of Nothing (and then The Return Of The Son Of Nothing). It was clear that the Floyd were in a heavily experimental, research and development phase, though some ideas were far more successful than others. One failed scheme involved each band member in turn going into the live room and overdubbing whatever they wanted in a chosen key, without hearing what the others had played, before listening to it all together. "Of course," Leckie notes, "it was fucking jumbled-up nonsense."

Still, as can be heard in the seven-minute-long Nothing Part 14 (eventually released on 2016's *The Early Years 1965-1972*), the foundations of Echoes were audibly beginning to take shape. As the layers began to further pile up, the eight-track limitations at Abbey Road forced a move to George Martin's 16-track AIR Studios in Oxford Circus.

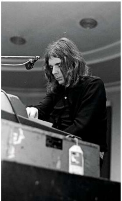
There, the band initiated other far-out experiments, working-titled Household Objects, where they attempted to create new soundscapes using everyday items: wine glasses, cutlery, and aerosol cans sprayed percussively. "The studio stunk of hairspray," Leckie remembers, "because they were going, 'Pfft… pfft… pfft…'"

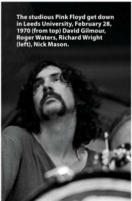
"I think the problem was there was a lot of fun being had, but we never actually got any further than that," Nick Mason recalls. "We'd sort of built ourselves a Victorian musical instrument, but we hadn't actually got any songs to play on it. There were four months of frustration, really, not making any progress."

"They weren't arguing," Leckie notes. "It was always an ongoing creative thing. Although there wasn't a plan, they kept working."

"I mean, it's ludicrous," Mason adds of the months-long endeavour, fated to enjoy an equally fruitless reprise in the wake of ➤

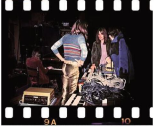
"Floyd were desperate for a hit single. Steve O'Rourke was always saying, 'Come on lads, you'll get dropped from EMI.'"
JOHN LECKIE





The studious Pink Floyd get down in Leeds University, February 28, 1970 (from top) David Gilmour, Roger Waters, Richard Wright (left), Nick Mason.

Andrew Cotterill, John Rettie(4), courtesy John Leckie



Work in progress: behind the scenes as Pink Floyd prepare to play the Fillmore East, New York, September 1970, during the early stages of the Atom Heart Mother World Tour.

≺ *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. "Because now you could more or less put all the work that went into that and do it in an afternoon with a decent synthesizer and sequencer."

COMPARED WITH THE early Household Objects diversions, the Nothing pieces offered more promise. Re-purposing parts in the embryonic Echoes, John Leckie believes that Waters, Mason and Wright were putting to use their shared grounding as students of architecture at Regent Street Polytechnic.

"I hate to say this and they're different now, obviously 50 years later, but back then they were never thought of as *musicians*," Leckie avers. "They weren't like The Soft Machine, who *were* musicians. The Floyd were building with blocks. They constructed their music in blocks of different colours and arrangements."

"Yes, I think probably there was a bit of that," Mason agrees. "We sort of took what we'd done with A Saucerful Of Secrets, the original title track [of the second, 1968 Floyd album], where we actually made a drawing of how it was going to work, almost like a critical path for a building. And we applied that to Echoes, although I can't remember ever doing an actual drawing of it."

A key element of Echoes, Rick Wright's keyboard 'pings', were chanced upon when routing his piano through a revolving Leslie speaker and the Binson Echorec delay so beloved of the Syd-era Floyd.

"The piano on Echoes really did happen spontaneously," says Leckie. "Most of the time with the Floyd, you'd spend getting a sound. Even if it was an acoustic guitar or a piano. Rick Wright said, 'Oh, can we put the piano through the Leslie?' So we miked the piano, but maybe it was too close to that one piano string, because every time he hit that note, it would go into the point of feedback. Everyone went, 'Oh wow, listen to *that*.'"

At the same time, Nothing Parts 1 and 2 were syphoned off to fuel One Of These Days. In their original state, the tracks were twin parts of a near-12-minute-long wig-out, which even featured the stolen voice of perma-cheery Radio 1 DJ Jimmy Young.

"I recorded One Of These Days at AIR Studios from scratch," Leckie recalls. "Putting the bass through the Echoplex [delay unit]. Long periods of 'dum-daa-dooga-daa' and turning the feedback up. It was a real freak-out jam session. Throw in anything: Jimmy Young, Nick Mason sped up, Nick Mason slowed down. I was a bit disappointed that it never survived at its full length."

Long tape loops became another creative tool – with two tape machines positioned six feet apart and used to build up eerie multi-voice effects, in a Heath Robinson-styled precursor to the modern-day loop pedal. "They did a lot of weird choir voice things, and you can hear it on Echoes," says Leckie. "Every now and again, you hear it fading up."

While some *Meddle* experiments lasted months, others were more impromptu. Leckie vividly remembers the day the daft canine blues of side one closer Seamus was recorded.

"Dave Gilmour comes in on a Saturday morning and he had this dog with him," he laughs. "He goes, 'Hey, listen to this.' He starts playing the harmonica and the dog's howling. 'Quick! Mike it up…' Seamus was done in minutes.

"But I can't understand why they put that on the record," Leckie adds. "I mean, what was the joke? I still haven't got the joke, really."

MOJO asks Nick Mason if Saucerful Of Secrets would ever consider a new version of Seamus? Can we expect a dog on-stage at some point?

"(*Laughs*) Uh. We're not recruiting at the moment."

CREATED IN THE STUDIO, but perfected on the road, Echoes was live-tested at various gigs, before being entirely re-recorded.

"It made absolute sense to have a song and take it out on the road and work to hone it into the best possible place," says Mason. "That all got knocked on the head by bootlegging. And we all got hopelessly over-protective because of bootlegging and went to enormous trouble to try and stop it happening and so on.

"But when I look back, I think it's a shame really," the drummer reflects. "Because working on the road is the perfect way of developing things."

Pink Floyd first played Echoes live (as The Return Of The Son Of Nothing) at the unglamorous-sounding Norwich Lads Club on April 22, 1971. It stayed in the set for their appearance at the Crystal Palace Garden Party three weeks later on May 15, where the show was marred by heavy rain. A reporter from the Croydon Advertiser was unmoved: "There was also a new work, The Return Of The Son Of Nothing, which didn't come across on first hearing as particularly distinguished."

But, by June, in a surviving bootleg from the Palazzo Dello Sport in Rome, we can hear Echoes is near-complete. Back in London in August, Floyd recorded it in virtually one take. "Yeah, they came in and what you hear on the record is them playing it all through, really," says John Leckie. "There might have been one or two edits, but it's not chopped together because they had played it live."

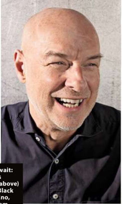
Ahead of the release of *Meddle* ≻

"It made sense to take a song out on the road and hone it. That all got knocked on the head by bootlegging."

NICK MASON

Amalie R. Rothschild (4)

Camera Press, Alamy (2), Getty (2), Eyevine



Stretch out and wait: extended mixers (clockwise from above) Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Brian Eno, Grateful Dead, Jem Finer, Fela Kuti & Africa 70, The Orb.

Long Long Long

Ten great songs that are longer than **ECHOES** (ie. 23:35).

THE LONGER FLOYD ONE
Pink Floyd – Atom Heart Mother (23:44)
(from Atom Heart Mother, Harvest, 1970)

Pseudo-classical suite (nearly called The Amazing Pudding) with starring roles for Rick Wright's organ, the brass section of the EMI Pops and John Aldiss's long-suffering choir, barking nonsense, all marshalled by avant-composer Ron Geesin. Best bit: when Gilmour comes in at 10:36. *DE*

THE POST-ROCK ONE
Godspeed You! Black Emperor – Providence (29:02)
(from F# A# ∞, Kranky, 1998)

The Canadian soundscapers perfected their – and post-rock's – blend of classical expansiveness, drone-rock repetition, Morricone twang, martial rhythms, found sound manipulations, obtuse references and grandstand dread as early as their first album. The glockenspiel of the apocalypse arrives, disingenuously, at 6:08. *JM*

THE TECHNO ONE
The Orb – The Blue Room (39:58)
(Big Life single, 1992)

Still-beautiful sub-pelagic trance assembled from a million samples (Weather Report, Mad Professor, Marilyn Monroe, Quentin Crisp…) and nailed to Jah Wobble's bass reverberations. Literally never a dull moment – and timed to qualify as a single, coming two seconds under what was then the limit. *DE*

THE JAZZ ONE
The Necks – Drive By (60:16)
(Fish Of Milk/ReR Megacorp album, 2003)

Most of the albums in the cult Australian trio's discography have a single track – infallibly graceful, jazz-adjacent improvisations that land around the hour mark. As a consequence, few bands have asserted the incremental pleasures of going long so consistently: start with this 2003 banger. *JM*

THE AFROBEAT ONE
Fela Kuti – Confusion (25:36)
(from Confusion, EMI, 1975)

This sonic recreation of the colourful chaos of inner-city Lagos starts with five minutes of Fela's eccentric electric piano and Tony Allen's percussive counterblasts, then goes funky with the entry of George Mark Bruce's bass before blooming into Afrobeat of the trippiest stripe. *DE*

THE AMBIENT ONE
Brian Eno – Reflection (54:00)
(Warp album, 2017)

Eno's ambient conceptualising upgraded to 'generative music', via microscopically evolving tones, designed to run off an app for however long you need to give your kitchen those minimalist gallery vibes. The CD edit clocks in at 54 minutes; Spotify adds an extra 10:24 of bespoke serenity. *JM*

THE HEAVY ONE
Boris – Absolutego (60:15)
(Fangs Anal Satan single, 1996)

Boris love their Brobdingnagian epics – cf. the ravishing Feedbacker (43:51) and minimalist Flood (70:32) – but the Japanese noise rockers are at their most bloody-minded across this hour of fuzz-gnarl and dentist-drill lock-groove. The 2001 reissue on Southern Lord is five minutes longer! *DE*

THE JAMMING ONE
Grateful Dead – Dark Star (48:06)
(From the Rhino album Europe '72, Vol. 15: Grote Zaal, De Doelen, Rotterdam, Holland (5/11/1972), 2011)

Never ones to play for an hour when they could stick around for four, the Dead's commitment to the never-ending jam regularly reached its apotheosis on Dark Star. This one is especially languid and jazzy, wanders into Can-esque zones, and is suspected to be the longest version extant. *JM*

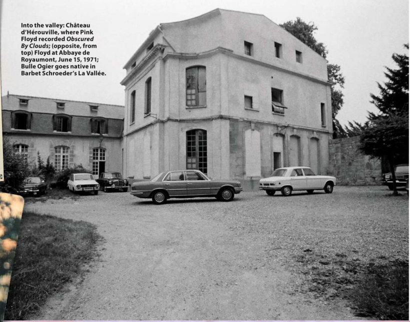
THE INDIE ONE
Microphones – Microphones In 2020 (44:44)
(from Microphones In 2020, P.W. Elverum & Sun Ltd, 2020)

Microphones/Mount Eerie man Phil Elverum intones his unspectacular autobiography ("I saw Stereolab in Bellingham and they played one chord for 15 minutes") over a minimal, hypnotic strum. Somehow, it's breathtaking. Best bit: when Elverum goes electric at 11:34. *DE*

THE 1000-YEAR ONE
Jem Finer – Longplayer (1000 years)
(www.longplayer.org, 1999)

Yep, that's right: this algorithmically regenerating piece derived from 234 Tibetan singing bowls and gongs is programmed to last the millennium – you've already missed the first 22 years. Installed at Bow Creek Lighthouse in east London, and the work of an unlikely meditative sound artist: Finer was originally banjo player in The Pogues. *JM*

Sat through by Danny Eccleston and John Mulvey



Into the valley: Château d'Hérouville, where Pink Floyd recorded *Obscured By Clouds*; (opposite, from top) Floyd at Abbaye de Royaumont, June 15, 1971; Bulle Ogier goes native in Barbet Schroeder's La Vallée.

Jungle Rock

What Pink Floyd did next. The story of *Obscured By Clouds* – the band's "production line" tour-de-force – by **TOM DOYLE**.

FOUR MONTHS AFTER the release of *Meddle* and just four weeks since they'd introduced the work-in-progress *Dark Side Of The Moon* song-suite into their live set, Pink Floyd forgot about all of that and instead decamped to France to make *Obscured By Clouds*, the oft-overlooked tissue connecting those two landmark records.

On February 23, 1972, 23 miles north-west of Paris, they took up residence at the Château d'Hérouville, the studio where the previous month Elton John had recorded his fifth album, *Honky Château*, its title immortalising the tumbledown charms of this hideaway facility behind ivy-covered 18th century walls. It was to prove a hugely creative setting for Pink Floyd, who wrote and recorded *Obscured By Clouds* there in an uncharacteristic 12-day sprint (broken up by a short Japanese tour).

Seriously considering film soundtracks as one of their possible futures, the band had accepted another commission from French film-maker Barbet Schroeder. After their successful scoring of his 1969 film More, they were to provide the music for La Vallée, his vogueish, impressionistic tale of hippies on a search for spiritual discovery in the jungles of Papua New Guinea.

There at the château, Floyd watched footage and sat with stopwatches, timing possible cues for their music. It was a valuable creative exercise for a band renowned for hoovering up expensive studio time in the name of (sometimes unproductive) experimentation. There was no time for self-indulgence on a project that needed to be nailed in a fortnight.

"We stayed in a room, wrote, recorded, like a production line," David Gilmour recalled to MOJO in 1998. "Very good for one to work like that sometimes – under extreme constraints of time and of trying to meet someone else's needs."

But, more than a stopgap soundtrack album, *Obscured By Clouds* was to quietly showcase some of the lyrical themes that would recur in *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and beyond: the passing of time, ambivalent feelings about fame and the music industry, and even, in Free Four, the first reference to Roger Waters' father, killed in World War II, and set to reappear in *The Wall* and *The Final Cut*.

"We had huge arguments about what exactly to do on some of those soundtrack albums," Gilmour reflected. "Some of us thought we should just put songs on them. Others thought we should turn the whole thing into [a] one-subject concept for the whole album."

> "BURNING BRIDGES IS A BIT OF RICK. IT'S NICE TO REMIND PEOPLE OF HIS INPUT."
> NICK MASON

OBSCURED BY CLOUDS veered towards the former. In fact, it's a surprisingly melodic set of songs for an arthouse movie score. Drop the needle on side one today and its opening title track sounds disorientatingly modern, thanks to Nick Mason's muted, looping drumming and synth drones supplied by Rick Wright using his just-purchased EMS VCS 3, which was to feature so prominently on *Dark Side*. "The first time we ever used any form of a synthesizer was on *Obscured By Clouds*," Gilmour recalled.

Meanwhile, the ticking tom-tom pulse at the beginning of Childhood's End provided a pre-echo of the intro of Time and – like the similarly slow-lane Burning Bridges and Wot's… Uh The Deal? – foregrounded Gilmour's dreamy, semi-detached vocals and soulful, unhurried guitar playing. Elsewhere, and in the tradition of The Nile Song from *More*, Floyd seemed to now view soundtracks as the place for their out-and-out rockers, with The Gold It's In The… being a sturdy up-tempo blues number inspired by the Steve Miller Band.

Roger Waters's sole turn at the microphone, Free Four, showcased his dark whimsy, with its jaunty acoustic arrangement the deceptive backing for pithy commentary on ageing, touring and war. Remarkably, it was released as a single in the US – flopping, but picking up more American radio airtime than for any Floyd 45 since See Emily Play in '67.

If La Vallée the film proved to be slow, indulgent and ho-hum, *Obscured By Clouds* was anything but. Although Pink Floyd's last soundtrack record, it can now be revisited as a playground where the band's collective imaginations ran free as they staked out new territories for their future creative manoeuvres.

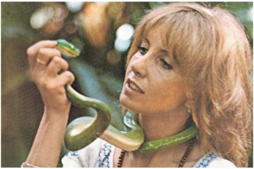
Today, Nick Mason is a big *Obscured By Clouds* fan. Childhood's End appeared in early Saucerful Of Secrets' setlists, while the addition of Burning Bridges to their upcoming shows is conceived partly as a tribute to Wright.

"What's quite nice is that Burning Bridges is a bit of Rick," he says. "It's nice to remind people of his input into the whole thing. His writing as well as his unique way of playing."

Mason admits that he's also keen to add The Gold It's In The… to future Saucers shows. Although he's yet to convince his bandmates…

"I couldn't get much enthusiasm from the rest of them," he laughs. "So, it's going to be a bit more of a battle to make it happen."

Getty, Alamy (2), Bridgeman Images (2)



⮜ on October 31, 1971, Floyd recorded what was to become the definitive performance version of Echoes, between October 4 and 7 in a ruined Roman amphitheatre for the filming of the Adrian Maben-directed Live At Pompeii.

For this purpose, Echoes was chopped in two, and bookended the film. Visually, Maben tapped into both the primeval ("No one showed us to the land") and disconnected human ("Strangers passing in the street") lyrical strands of the song, with shots of bubbling lava and the band members wandering aimlessly, lost on dusty hillsides. Roger Waters later explained his lyric as concerning "the potential that human beings have for recognising each other's humanity and responding to it, with empathy rather than antipathy."

The star of the two-part Live At Pompeii Echoes, however, is arguably Nick Mason, who can be seen absolutely throwing himself into his jazzy fills and hammering through Wright's Hammond-led section with a beat that is almost proto-hip-hop.

"If you think back to Pompeii," says Gary Kemp, "and how much drum work was in that and how much the camera landed on Nick, it was much more about him."

"He's an absolute ox on the drums," attests Saucers' keyboard player Dom Beken. "It's hysterical. I don't quite know how he does it. I mean, he's clearly technically skilled as a drummer. But what goes above and beyond that is his musicality and his ability to understand exactly what a song needs.

"Y'know, you never look to Nick for insane jazz licks," he adds. "But his ability to sail through changes in time signature and to perfectly complement what's happening musically, and to use a drum kit as a real musical instrument, is just jaw-dropping all the time."

Mason himself is modest where his drumming prowess in Live At Pompeii is concerned. "Well, I view it with a pinch of salt in a way," he chuckles. "There is a story that what happened was there was a lot of other footage that got lost. And all they'd really got for One Of These Days was the footage from the rail track they'd put round the drum kit with me in the middle of it. So, they were very short of material…"

WHILE SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS WERE SHY OF airing their new take on Echoes for this writer, they will admit to the various challenges recreating the track has presented. "It's fucking long," Dom Beken laughs. "It goes on forever, mate."

"The interesting thing with Echoes," says Mason, "and the same occurs with the original Atom Heart Mother to a little extent, is that I love it, but in my opinion, it's a bit too long. Things are repeated unnecessarily often. The Nothings 1 to 24 are probably more like Nothings 1 to 10, recycled as 24. There's quite a lot of returning to the same sequences on the original album."

As such, Mason suggests that modifying Echoes for the Saucerful Of Secrets set was necessary: "The challenge is, do we play it exactly as it was on the record? No, thank you. Not what I think we should do. So, it's to do a bit of a rearrangement of it – deciding which parts have to be there, which shouldn't be there, and so on."

Then there's the problem of *which* Echoes to use as a template.

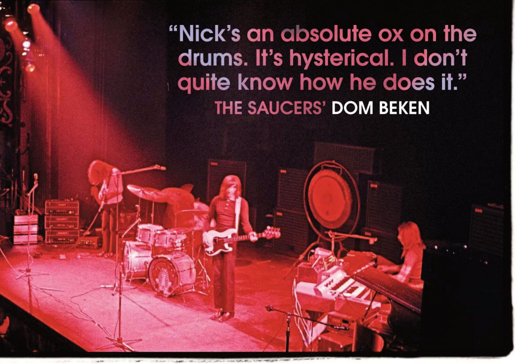
"Do we go to the Pompeii version?" asks Gary Kemp, rhetorically. "Do we go to the *Meddle* version? I think we lean more to the *Meddle* version. But we never see ourselves as a tribute act, so it's not second-by-second how it is on *Meddle*."

The post-Waters Floyd of the 1980s faced the same problem. The Gilmour/Mason/Wright line-up of '87's A Momentary Lapse Of Reason tour initially installed a truncated, 17-minute version of Echoes in their set. It was aired only 11 times, however, before being dropped in favour of Shine On You Crazy Diamond.

Guy Pratt, the Waters-replacing bassist on that tour, remembers Gilmour identifying the main difficulty and telling him, "'The trouble with modern musicians is they just don't know how to disintegrate.' People [in the extended band] wanted bar counts and stuff like that."

Gilmour subsequently revived Echoes for his On An Island ⮞

“Nick’s an absolute ox on the drums. It’s hysterical. I don’t quite know how he does it.”
THE SAUCERS’ DOM BEKEN



This is not nothing: Pink Floyd setting the controls for the heart of Echoes, Fillmore East, New York, September 27, 1970, (from left) David Gilmour, Nick Mason, Roger Waters, Richard Wright.

Amalie R. Rothschild

≺ tour in 2006, performing it nightly in its original form as a duet with Wright, before respectfully shelving the song following Wright’s death in 2008. “This version has to be more about Nick,” Kemp reckons. “So, y’know, there’s no point doing extended guitar or keyboard solos. We want to get to the bits that are about Nick, and so that’s how we’ve been working it.”

One key Gilmour-performed element is crucial to Echoes, though – namely the ‘seagull’ guitar sounds foregrounded in its ambient passage. It was another effect originally arrived at by accident.

“A roadie had plugged the input cable into the output of the wah-wah pedal, and vice versa,” explains Lee Harris, whose task it is to recreate the sound live. “There’s a guy in America who’s a guru of distortion called Analog Mike. He runs a company called Analog Man and I bought a wah off of him. He’s just rewired it inside with a switch for me to get the sound.”

“I think I’m keener to retain the electric seagulls,” Mason says, implying that it might well feature in their new arrangement. “Because the seagulls… apart from anything else, there’s the opportunity to play it slightly differently every time.”

AS BEFITS ITS TITLE, THE INFLUENCE OF ECHOES HAS reverberated down the decades. It’s been covered by artists as weirdly disparate as Alien Sex Fiend and Rodrigo y Gabriela, while its symphonic ambition left its mark on Radiohead during the making of *OK Computer*. Guitarist Jonny Greenwood’s extra-curricular passion at the time was kite-flying, which he soundtracked by playing *Meddle* through his Walkman headphones.

His enthusiasm for ’71 Floyd wasn’t matched by all his bandmates, however. Colin Greenwood told this writer back in 1997: “Jonny made us all watch Pink Floyd Live At Pompeii. I just remember seeing Dave Gilmour sitting on his arse playing guitar, and Roger Waters – with long, greasy hair, sandals and dusty flares – staggers over and picks up this big beater and whacks this gong. Ridiculous.”

Ridiculous, maybe, yet still iconic. Five years earlier, in the video for Gratitude from 1992’s *Check Your Head*, the Beastie Boys paid homage to Live At Pompeii by recreating its visual environment in Rotorua, New Zealand, complete with amps stencilled with the words, “Pink Floyd London”.

There was one “homage” too far for Roger Waters, however. Namely Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Overture for The Phantom Of The Opera, which seemed to crib the chromatic “da-da-da-da-daaah” riff from Echoes.

“I couldn’t believe it when I heard it,” Waters ranted to Tom Hibbert in Q magazine in 1992. “It’s the same time signature – it’s 12/8 – and it’s the same notes and it’s the same everything. Bastard. It probably is actionable. It really is!”

Back in 1971, Echoes changed everything for Pink Floyd. Up until that point their experiments with lengthy, episodic tracks had ranged wildly between the brilliant and disorientating A Saucerful Of Secrets to the lumpen orchestral rock of Atom Heart Mother. “I think they were lost at that point,” John Leckie says of the latter. “They were desperate for a hit single. Even then, people wanted radio play singles. [Manager] Steve O’Rourke was always kicking them, saying, ‘Come on lads, you’ll get dropped from EMI.’”

“We were very good at announcing we weren’t a singles band,” agrees Nick Mason, before adding a self-deprecatory dig. “But really it was because no one would buy them.”

By fully repositioning them as an albums band, Echoes – a defining, showstopping track that could only exist on an LP – effectively saved Pink Floyd. It was the key that unlocked the door that led to *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, and, in 2021, it’s still sustaining them (or, at least, one third of their surviving number). Just like Andrew Lloyd Webber’s spooky musical, this one will run and run.

“Well, funnily enough we refer to Echoes as ‘The Phantom’,” laughs Mason. “When was Phantom Of The Opera done? Who was there first?”

The Phantom premiered in 1986, replies MOJO.

“Well then,” he says, brightly. “I must remember to sue him!” Ⓜ

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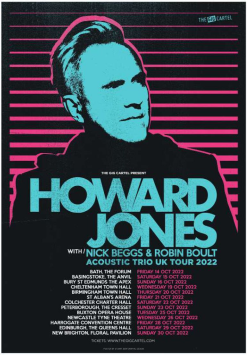
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YOUR PRETTY FACE IS GOING TO HELL

Iggy Pop live, 1977

Rock: "Iggy was a primal force, the like of which has never been equalled in rock'n'roll. He was a 'monster' in the Shakespearean sense, elemental, a force of nature."

ROCK ACTION!

The snapper who mixed glam with the dark stuff sashayed off this mortal coil last November, but left us with hundreds of images that brought music and its makers to life. A new book collects some of MICK ROCK's best and most surprising shots of Iggy, Lou, Syd, Bowie and more, and MOJO is proud to preview a stunning selection. Rock on!

THERE ARE MUSIC PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO pride themselves on their anonymity – their ability to disappear into the background and *observe*, the proverbial fly on the wall. Mick Rock was the opposite: a massive personality who lent his own energy to the people and events he recorded. On the occasions he would appear in the MOJO office – his attire never complete without an extravagant scarf – he would call everyone 'darling', regardless of their gender, like a star of the stage fresh from an excellent lunch at the Garrick.

Rock discovered photography and drugs simultaneously, in the rooms of a "well-heeled friend" at Cambridge University. In the course of a trip on blotter acid he picked up his host's Pentax camera. "At the height of the lunacy, I started to point and click," he recalls in Shot! By Rock, the upcoming compendium of his work from which these pictures are taken. "Especially in the direction of a particularly attractive young lady who was in attendance. Every time I clicked, I also took a deep breath: she changed physically from very young to very old, very big to very small. She changed colours, from blue to pink. It got me very excited as my brain slithered from the past to the future, from the gutter to a palace. From paranoia to bliss. From a spaceship to a dungeon."

Rock's sensitivity to exotic vibrations is evident in his earliest shots of a musician: his Cambridge pal Syd Barrett. Later, his portraits for the cover of Barrett's *The Madcap Laughs* were, in his own estimation, "personal and intimate… I don't think anyone else could have taken them." Certainly, his relationship with Barrett interested Rock's next key subject, David Bowie, and forged a connection with the latter that produced hundreds of iconic images, of Bowie and his circle, Iggy Pop and Lou Reed ("the Unholy Trinity"). Mick Rock's larger-than-lifeness chimed with the time and his images helped give it a name: glam.

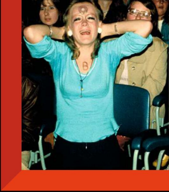
But Rock was not immune to the dark side of the garish life he documented. In fact, his enthusiasm for cocaine was so unashamed that the drug inspired a series of loving still lives – piles of white powder, mind-boggling amounts – some featured in Shot! By Rock. "I remember telling someone once how pleased I was with them, looking all white and shiny," he writes. "They reminded me the only reason I got such great pictures was that I was in love with the subject."

But cocaine did not love him back. By 1995, Rock was broke. In 1996, multiple heart attacks required a quadruple bypass in a New York hospital, financed by friends. And yet Shot! By Rock testifies to his subsequent rehabilitation, with brilliant pictures in the 21st century of Lady Gaga, Janelle Monáe, Lana Del Rey, Deerhunter's Bradford Cox (as Jesus Christ, of course), and returning to something like the beginning, David Bowie.

Mick Rock didn't just shoot musicians. Shot! By Rock contains pictures of actors, Kabuki troupes and erotica. But he knew and understood musicians – his breakthrough magazine commissions with Barrett and Bowie were accompanied with his own interviews – and that rapport and sense of dialogue with rock'n'roll is what made his music photographs special. Just look at the young fan on page 60, lit up by his internal soundtrack, *transformed*. It's Mick Rock in a nutshell. ➢

IRREGULAR HEADS
Syd Barrett and Mick Rock, Cambridge, 1971

"Syd had retired to Cambridge and was living in his mum's house," writes Rock. "The amazing thing about Syd is that he never goes away. My very first conversations with Bowie were about Syd. He was so obsessed with his total Englishness, the way he sang like he spoke."



HANG ON TO YOURSELF

David Bowie fans, 1973

Rock captures what he describes as "the agony, the ecstasy" of rock'n'roll fandom on what's known as the Ziggy Stardust Tour. "There weren't many people around at the beginning of Ziggy Stardust," he notes. "But within a few months, he was all over the place."

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

Jeff Beck, Mick Jagger, Rod Stewart and police

For Rock, Access All Areas meant exactly that, but everyone looks a bit too relaxed for this to have been a backstage bust, and after all, Keith Richards isn't here. Rod wears a Celtic shirt. Obscured by coppers is Ron Wood. The event? Answers on a postcard, please!

ROCK'N'ROLL HEART

Lou Reed, 1975

Rock always got on well with the grumpy Reed. He wasn't sure why. "Pale white face, darkened eyes, and a lipsticked mouth telling you all about his dark side, the demons, the thrilling highs and the sunken lows... Lou was fabulous in all ways. The fact that he was completely screwed up in all ways, well, that never worried me."

HOW DARE I BE SO BEAUTIFUL?

Peter Gabriel, London, 1973

The Genesis frontman in attack mode, circa *Selling England By The Pound*. "He said this 1973 studio shot was one of his favourite pictures of himself ever taken," writes Rock. "I had a small apartment in King's Cross where this was shot. Peter was very game. Unforgettable."

HEATHEN CHEMISTRY

David Bowie, New York, 2002

It had been years since Rock had last shot Bowie, but their surreal 2002 collaboration was an instant classic. "I took the pictures, but he understood – perhaps more than anyone – their impact. Together, we used photographs to establish an image to capture both the otherworldly and the ordinary. He knew he couldn't get there through music alone."

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

Tony Campbell, Camden, 1972

Snapped *ad hoc* by Rock on an adventure playground on the Regent's Park Estate ("there was a festival going on," its subject told designer-blogger Randy Ludacer in 2016), this was rejected for the sleeve of Mott The Hoople's *All The Young Dudes* album (it later made the cover of Third Eye Blind's 2003 *Out Of The Vein*). "Cheesed off?" writes Rock. "Nah."

EAT TO THE BEAT

Debbie Harry and Chris Stein, New York, 1978

The Blondie singer and guitarist at home. "Blondie didn't really come out of the pop or punk thing," writes Rock. "It was more a downtown, bohemian thing. They were artists. Yet there was a lack of pretence. They were just having fun, very relaxed larking about as a band."

VAGABOND OF THE WESTERN WORLD

Phil Lynott, giving Rock the finger

Rock could do grit as well as glamour, as in this dynamic portrait of Thin Lizzy's doomed singer/writer/bassist. "He was amazing – like Hendrix with longer legs," writes the photographer. "Phil was very charming, especially around the girls. Not only musical chops; he had everything. Just didn't get himself redeemed. He got too far in."

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE GOT

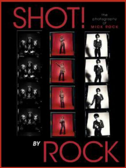
Joan Jett, New York, 1981

The iconic cover of Jett's *I Love Rock'N'Roll* album. "We didn't plan anything," Rock writes. "I got a late-night call from her manager to say they'd tried three other photographers and hated the results. She came round to the studio with a few changes of clothing, and at around 3am we got this shot. I thought she looked like the female Elvis."

SOLITUDE

Ozzy Osbourne, 1974

Black Sabbath's gonzo singer in rare contemplative mode. "A very pretty picture," notes Rock. "Not glam, or punk. It's a whole other animal. He looks like a poet. I can make anyone look like a poet."

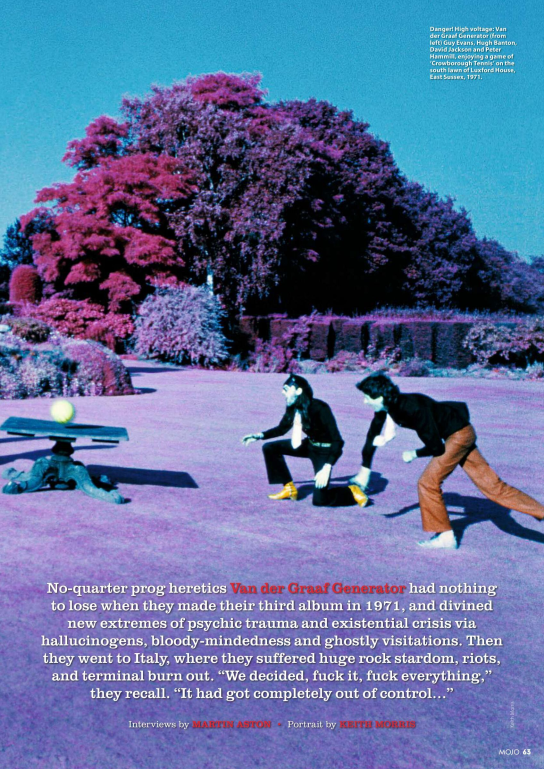


STARS ON 35MM

Shot! By Rock is published in hardback by Titan Books on April 1. Weighing in at 288 glossy pages, with photographs accompanied by Rock's own text, it is priced at £34.99 and is available for pre-order now from all book and online retailers. For more information, visit titanbooks.com

MOJO EYEWITNESS

VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR REACH ENDGAME WITH *PAWN HEARTS*



Danger! High voltage: Van der Graaf Generator (from left) Guy Evans, Hugh Banton, David Jackson and Peter Hammill, enjoying a game of 'Crowborough Tennis' on the south lawn of Luxford House, East Sussex, 1971.

Keith Morris

No-quarter prog heretics Van der Graaf Generator had nothing to lose when they made their third album in 1971, and divined new extremes of psychic trauma and existential crisis via hallucinogens, bloody-mindedness and ghostly visitations. Then they went to Italy, where they suffered huge rock stardom, riots, and terminal burn out. "We decided, fuck it, fuck everything," they recall. "It had got completely out of control..."

Interviews by MARTIN ASTON • Portrait by KEITH MORRIS

"SOMEONE SHOUTED, 'FUCK OFF WITH YOUR MUSIC!' ...ONE OF OUR CATCHPHRASES FOR A WHILE."
Hugh Banton

John Anthony: In 1969, I was DJ-ing at [London club] the Speakeasy. There were three bands that could empty the place: Egg, Jody Grind and Van der Graaf Generator. But I loved that. VdGG were far out and not trying to be rock'n'roll and groovy, ploughing their own path.

Peter Hammill: There hadn't been a line-up like ours, with lead saxophone and organ, and an almost complete absence of guitars. Like a late-'60s soul band, but warped by the spirit of Stockhausen and Messiaen, sci-fi, Catholicism and Icelandic sagas. Big stories, moral rights and wrongs, the 'What if?' world. I think we wanted to make things difficult for ourselves by creating music that had the capacity to trip us up. The others were firing so much, they needed something more complicated to work on.

Guy Evans: Peter was – is – a pretty extreme writer. He was also amazingly open to having his stuff messed about with, in whatever way we were inclined. It wasn't a policy to be extreme or uncompromising, though we rejected the prog norms of the time – they were getting tedious.

David Jackson: Sometimes our music had the feeling of tragedy, like White Hammer [from 1970's *The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other*]. I remember it was playing on the stereo when a little boy came into the room and I quickly took it off, because of all the screaming saxophones playing augmented fourths, which is known as the Devil's Interval.

PH: Life was pretty pell-mell and headlong, always touring, living hand to mouth and snatching studio time whenever we could, usually late at night. We had a little more success in Belgium and France than the UK, though we did OK here. The Six Bob Tour [in April '71] was a particular turning point.

Paul Conroy: It was brave of [VdGG's record label] Charisma to send out VdGG as part of a three-band bill, with Lindisfarne and Genesis, though it was remarkably good value at six bob [30p]. They went down well, but they were never rabble-rousers, more of a dedicated cult.

Glen Colson: VdGG were the hardest act to promote, because they were too awkward and inaccessible. There was no chance of a hit single. We'd bribe people, like dropping £200 to get them on TV and send people out to buy records, but even that didn't work. Johnny Rotten later said they were his favourite band, but, at the time, you could count fans in the media on one hand.

DJ: When our albums and gigs got reviewed, good or bad, they were a catalyst: you felt you had to be better, and more convincing.

GE: We next toured Germany [in May '71], something mad like 23 cities in 28 days, in extreme discomfort, awful accommodation, problems getting paid, and a tiny tour bus.

DJ: We also had to contend with a controversial campaign in Germany for free music, with protesters outside gigs with banners reading, "Why can't we come in for nothing? Bands shouldn't get paid!"

Hugh Banton: At one gig, someone shouted, "Fuck off with your music!" which became one of our catchphrases for a while.

PH: [One day on the tour] we started talking to an American deserter, and we thought, "Our lives aren't that bad compared to him, but it's just not working, what can we do?" We decided, "Fuck it, fuck everything, let's charge ahead", in the spirit of being free as well. We became much more aggressive, and started going down much better!

GE: We played harder but also stretched out into more impressionistic waters. Peter's songwriting became less claustrophobic, which gave us even more scope for inspiration.

DJ: We practised incessantly. The music was forged by fire and steel, passages flying and crashing into the next part. We traditionally went somewhere to rehearse, to lock ourselves in, and this time we went to [Charisma label boss Tony Stratton Smith's] place in Crowborough [East Sussex]. With no neighbours, we could play day or night, and that's where so much creative stuff was made, and substances consumed.

PH: There was acid and a degree of mescaline taken at Crowborough. But we weren't loons, it was recreational rather than Carlos Castaneda.

GE: How could acid not affect the music? We were eager to not necessarily take things in their literal sense, but to think sideways around the music, to perform obliquely.

PH: Everyone thought Crowborough was haunted. One particular portrait, the eyes followed you around the room.

GC: The house in Crowborough was built from the oak timbers of the Spanish Armada broken up by storms. When John Anthony and I were later listening to a test pressing of the album there, we saw a ghost, an old guy. He was sat behind us. As soon as we turned around, he ran back into a painting. John said, "Did you see what I saw?"

JA: Take what Glen says with a pinch of salt. I was on acid so was probably the wrong person to ask!

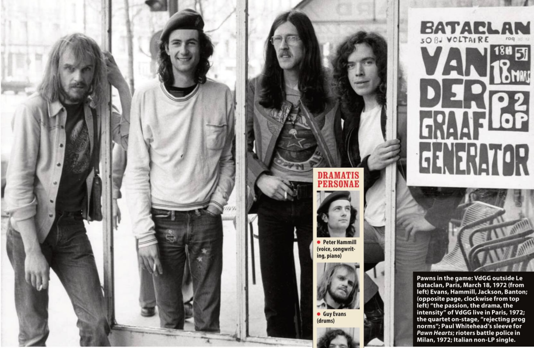
PH: We were well given to spooking each other out, like playing in the dark, howling banshee stuff, lots of echo and distortion.

GE: We'd play only illuminated by the moving waveforms of the oscilloscope connected to the organ that Hugh was building. We'd egg each other on and often be very amused at the extremities that we were creating.

DJ: With hallucinogens, you become hyper-sensitised – if one of you goes off, the others follow. The music got freakier, more intense, and colourful. It took us over.

PH: I did feel pretty haunted a lot of the time. There was a presence, a malevolence I'd say, which was part of the spirituality of the music, something I'd call *otherly*. I was able to channel

Eyevine, Paul Whitehead, Bridgeman images, thanks to vandergraafgenerator.co.uk x3, Urban Image, Herman Pemmentier



Pawns in the game: VdGG outside Le Bataclan, Paris, March 18, 1972 (from left) Evans, Hammill, Jackson, Banton; (opposite page, clockwise from top left) "the passion, the drama, the intensity" of VdGG live in Paris, 1972; the quartet on-stage, "rejecting prog norms"; Paul Whitehead's sleeve for *Pawn Hearts*; rioters battle police in Milan, 1972; Italian non-LP single.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

● **Peter Hammill (voice, songwriting, piano)**

● **Guy Evans (drums)**

● **Hugh Banton (organ, bass pedals)**

● **David Jackson (saxophone)**

● **John Anthony (producer)**

● **Paul Conroy (Charisma booking agent)**

● **Glen Colson (Charisma press officer)**

● **Paul Whitehead (album cover artist)**

the feelings of alienation, spookiness and fear.

JA: At Crowborough, Peter played me the new album on acoustic guitar and piano. It struck me as gothic horror mixed with JW Turner. I wanted the album [recorded at Trident in summer '71] to sound mysterious, with depth and perspective.

PH: Of the three tracks on *Pawn Hearts*, Lighthouse Keepers was about alienation, the individual's inability to come to terms with society. Lemmings was the sense of, 'shit's got real… what's coming now?', but also about suicidal tendencies. Man-Erg was: we all contain a balance of negatives and positives, nobody's an outright angel or villain. As a philosophical strand, it was a bit weedy, but it gave us a chance to play some cracking tunes!

DJ: Someone said, "Oh, another of your fucking horn parts" – and I came back, accidentally, with [the spoonerism] "pawn hearts".

Paul Whitehead: I asked Peter what the idea was behind the title *Pawn Hearts*. He said, "Basically, everyone is a pawn, no matter what your status is in life, a king or a street sweeper."

PH: We also thought we'd have a photo of the band for once, for the inside gatefold sleeve. [Photographer] Keith Morris came to Crowborough and took infra-red photos of us playing our invented game of Crowborough Tennis, which involved whacking a football across a table, like volleyball. Afterwards, Keith said, "Three of you stand on the table, and Jackson run toward you." In Germany, we'd seen probably the last remaining Nazi statues, so that's what we copied. When Keith showed us the contact sheet, our jaws dropped. But it was self-evident that we weren't fascists, therefore it was OK to use it.

GE: The image was meant to be linked to the title *Pawn Hearts* – about people who surrender to manipulation. It's a very strong image, but a tricky and uncomfortable image too, which I have wrestled with since.

JA: A lot of people didn't know what to make of *Pawn Hearts* [released in October '71]. I think Charisma felt threatened by the music, like, "What do we do with this?" But it started being recognised as the masterpiece it was. It was a new type of record for that time.

PC: One night in the Marquee, we met three Italian promoters who all wanted to book VdGG.

JA: Of course, Italians loved *Pawn Hearts*, it's fucking opera!

DJ: Absolutely there was something operatic about VdGG, the passion, the drama, the intensity, like Verdi.

PH: We had no idea we were so successful in Italy until we got there. We'd thought, "OK, a comparatively stress-free holiday and some gigs"…

PC: The first show was at Teatro Massimo in Milan [February 8, 1972], a big place. They had to do two shows a day in each city; the earlier show was more attended by youngsters, the later show seemed more for couples.

GE: When we arrived in Milan for the early show, there was police everywhere, and loads of people trying to get in when the place was already full. By evening, it had escalated to tear gas and flares. It was hard to judge how much was to do with us or the fact that any gathering of youth culture was exploited by every extreme political group in Italy.

PC: Outside were a collection of Trotskyists, nihilists, who knows, but the Italians clearly like to riot. The next day, we woke up, and it was just another day to the Italians.

DJ: We became popular in Italy, too popular for our own good. We wouldn't have broken up if we were happy.

HB: Nothing prepared us for what happened in Italy. The promoter somehow managed to get our albums lined up at the top of the charts, so we were superstars before we'd even arrived. But we went back to Italy during a very hot summer, two shows a day again, and not getting paid, the drink and drugging, coffee and grappa at motorway service stations, a beer or two, off we'd go again. We went back to Italy a third time [in July]. Madness.

PH: It had got out of control. Maybe adding the drama and wonder of Italy to the firecracker world of VdGG became too much. I had to quit [in August '72]. I wanted some quieter time, to do some different stuff, and not tour so much.

GE: Classic Van der Graaf: the most success we'd ever had, and breaking up. But if Peter hadn't left, I don't know how long we'd have survived anyway.

DJ: We were all exhausted but there wasn't the same demand on us as him. So, he went off on his own, and he's never stopped. He keeps reinventing himself in different forms, like Bowie.

GE: Possibly why fans have stayed with us is because they also see a cosmic laugh at the centre. How the human spirit can transcend all sorts of stuff.

PH: First, came a Van der Graaf re-formation [1975] and then a reunion [2005]. Frankly, I'm amazed we've got this far! Guy always had the phrase – "this unstable entity, this impossible unit." Ⓜ

VdGG tour UK/Europe in February 2022. The Charisma Years box set is being re-pressed; Special Edition remastered LPs are out now.

Paul Whitehead and Trisha van Cleef's show Artist In Residence runs at the Ojai Art Center, California, until March 22.

The Cat In The Hat

In *The Monkees*, *Michael Nesmith* was the still, cool eye of the hurricane, holding a torch for real music amid the wacky fabrications. But as Micky Dolenz and others reveal to MOJO, he died understanding the joy the band gave to millions. "It was fantasy becoming reality, art becoming life," they tell *David Fricke*.

Photograph: *Ken Whitmore*.

Listen to the band: The Monkees (from left) Mike Nesmith, Micky Dolenz, Davy Jones and Peter Tork in 1966.

Ken Whitmore/mptvimages/eyevine

ON JUNE 1, 1968, MICHAEL NESMITH WALKED into the RCA Victor studios in Nashville with an idea for a tune – no lyrics yet, just some chords – that, as the day progressed, became a mission statement for him as a musician, songwriter and, at that moment, a member of one of the biggest and most divisive groups in pop. Nesmith called the song Listen To The Band.

The year before, Nesmith, Micky Dolenz, Davy Jones and Peter Tork – The Monkees – had wrestled control of their records from the Hollywood producers and label executives who brought them together in 1965 to play a fictional combo in a television series. Gifted ➢

➤ singers and players with varying degrees of studio and gig experience, the four proved themselves with the folk rock spell and psychedelic tinge of the 1967 Number 1s, *Headquarters* and *Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn & Jones Ltd*. But they often worked apart, on their own tracks with studio musicians, and Nesmith – a lanky Texan who was writing with a country drawl in Papa Gene's Blues and Sweet Young Thing on the 1966 debut, *The Monkees* – was in Nashville cutting new material with the local pros.

"One of the things I wanted to do," Nesmith later explained, "was experiment with pure Nashville players playing a type of rock'n'roll sensibility." To that end, he reversed the chords from Nine Times Blue, a straight-up country stroll he'd recorded that April in Hollywood, and made up words at the mike "just to give me something to sing." With Salvation Army-style brass overdubbed in Los Angeles and an odd, false ending, like a radio briefly losing reception, Listen To The Band became an anthemic dreaming – "hard-core mountain music," as Nesmith put it, via the Whisky A Go Go – about the redemptive power of a great rock'n'roll combo: "Listen to the band/Weren't they good?/They made me happy."

It was short-lived euphoria. Tork quit the Monkees in late 1968, unhappy with a limited role in the music and his image as a lovable dummy. And when Listen To The Band was issued as a single in April 1969, Nesmith's first lead vocal on a Monkees A-side stalled at Number 63 in Billboard: a crushing fall from the stratosphere – The Monkees' two-year run on NBC; six Top 5 hits from 1966 to 1968 – that affirmed, for many in the press and music industry, the stigma of a Prefab Four, built in The Beatles' image minus the wit and vision.

Before it came out, Nesmith played Listen To The Band for producer Richard Perry, then on the rise for his work with Captain Beefheart, Fats Domino and Tiny Tim. According to The Monkees' longtime historian Andrew Sandoval, Perry told Nesmith, "You did a good job, the production's good. But I would never buy that record." When Nesmith asked why, Perry said, "Because I would never buy a record by The Monkees."

In March 1970, Nesmith bought out the rest of his contract for $186,000, leaving Jones and Dolenz to carry on for a few more months.

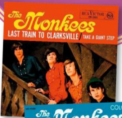
ON NOVEMBER 14, 2021, 53 YEARS AFTER THAT Nashville session and a month before his death on December 10 at the age of 78 from heart failure, Nesmith sang Listen To The Band for the last time at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles. It was the closing date of The Monkees Present: The Mike And Micky Show, an evening of hits and memories that he and Dolenz first took on the road in 2018 – six years after Jones's death in 2012 and shortly before Tork died in February 2019.

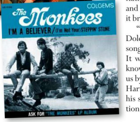
As they did at most stops last fall, Nesmith and Dolenz opened with Good Clean Fun, a jubilant hoedown the former recorded that same day in Nashville. The duo then raced through two sets of AM-radio gold – Last Train To Clarksville, Pleasant Valley Sunday, Daydream Believer – and deeper tracks with a striking focus on Nesmith's craft and nerve during his five years in the whirlwind. There was the stinging-jingle march You Just May Be The One from *Headquarters*; Dylan-esque surrealism in the '68 B-side Tapioca Tundra; and the acid-country hymn St Matthew – a '68-Nashville number that didn't come out for another 22 years – before Listen To The Band came up in the encore.

Getty (3), © mptvimages/eyevine, Avalon.red

"Nez had been led to believe that he was going to be able to play his music, write his songs. He was very frustrated."

Micky Dolenz





"Nez was misled to some degree," Dolenz recalls, speaking a few days after his bandmate's passing. "When he was cast on the show, he had never done TV. He didn't know the whole process" – something Dolenz knew well as an LA-born child actor. (He played the title character in the late-'50s series, Circus Boy.) "Nez had been led to believe that he was going to be able to play his music, write his songs. But he was very frustrated when things got rolling."

Sandoval – who has worked with The Monkees for more than three decades as their biographer, reissue producer and a close advisor on their reunions – points out that Nesmith wrote Listen To The Band as "one verse, repeated as if it's an incantation. It's a meditation to himself – that music will heal him, and it might heal us too. He believed in it, and it broke his heart when it wasn't a hit single."

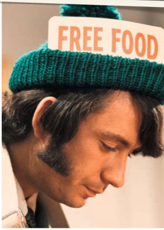
"That's why I loved this last tour we did," Dolenz, 76, says, "because we were doing these songs and seeing the audience appreciate that. It was like he had a cathartic moment, acknowledging those wonderful songs written for us by Neil Diamond, Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart and Gerry Goffin and Carole King. And his songs were a part of it. It was an appreciation by him – and for him."

"MADNESS!!" SCREAMED THE FIRST LINE OF type in the ads that appeared in early September 1965 in the entertainment-trade papers Variety and The Hollywood Reporter. Below the hyperbole was a call for auditions by "Folk & Roll Musicians-Singers" to play "4 insane boys, aged 17-21" in a TV show. There was a Los Angeles phone number and fair warning in extra-dark print: "Have courage to work."

Nesmith was not a boy but in sore need of a break when he called that number, encouraged by Barry Friedman, the publicist at LA's folk rock ground zero, the Troubadour. (Friedman soon moved into management and record production, changing his name to Frazier Mohawk.) Nesmith, then 22, was running the Troubadour's Monday-night hootenannies: organising the bills, introducing the acts and performing his own tunes on occasion. He was also married, a new father, a military veteran – honourably discharged after a spell in the Air Force – and so broke that, at one point, he and his then-wife Phyllis were living in a car.

The producers behind the ad, Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson, had gone through nearly 300 applicants – many of them dire, others with the wrong look for TV (like a pre-Buffalo Springfield Stephen Stills, who recommended his friend Tork) – when Nesmith arrived on the Columbia Pictures lot carrying a bag with his dirty laundry and sporting a woolly hat he wore to keep the hair out of his eyes when riding his motorcycle. Asked about his previous show-business experience, Nesmith replied, "I was a failure" – a "genuine" answer, he reflected to MOJO in 2017, "because it was the way I felt." He did not regret the hat, which became a visual signature, because "it was one of the things," he told MOJO on another occasion, "that got me the call back."

Robert Michael Nesmith was born on December 30, 1942 in Houston, Texas. He was four when his parents divorced, moving with his mother Bette to Dallas where she had family. "I was raised entirely by… strong-willed, strong-minded clear-thinking women," Nesmith recalled. Bette was a Christian Scientist, a faith advocating the power in prayer to overcome physical ailment. She was an entrepreneur too, inventing Liquid Paper, a typewriter-correction fluid, in the mid-'50s when she was a secretary and running her own, multi-million-dollar firm into the mid-'70s. ➤

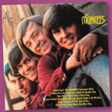


Monkeying around: (clockwise from above) barber shop quartet, The Monkees TV show, 1966; WAR!-mongers in 1968 film Head; Nez in a giving mood; appearing on The Johnny Cash Show, July 19, 1969; busy singing around the piano; in the Nudie – Nesmith attends a premiere screening for Head.

Cheeky Monkee!: Nez plays it for laughs while recording The Monkees, 1967. "It was a show about a band that *wanted* to be The Beatles but never made it," says Micky Dolenz.

A Swingin' Affair

A barrel full of Monkees albums, celebrated by Lois Wilson.



The Monkees

(Colgems, 1966)

Heralded by the exquisite Paperback Rewrite of Last Train To Clarksville, The Monkees' debut introduced Nesmith as a fully-fledged singer-songwriter, his countryish nasalese captured perfectly on the self-penned Brit-Invasion-meets-Texas twang of Papa Gene's Blues plus Sweet Young Thing, his captivating co-write with Goffin and King.

More Of The Monkees

(Colgems, 1967)

Mary Mary introduces Nesmith the intuitive producer who brings grit and gusto to his song, sung here by Micky Dolenz, but first recorded by The Paul Butterfield Blues Band (it was later covered by Run-DMC in 1988). The garage-poppy The Kind Of Girl I Could Love (authored with Roger Atkins) provides another Nesmith thrill. And then there's I'm A Believer. Believe!

Headquarters

(Colgems, 1967)

The group seize creative control and write and play the majority of their 1967 third album. The result? Their third of four consecutive US Number 1s. Nesmith's You Just May Be The One provides one of the many highlights. A vocal harmony-drenched slice of jangly folk-pop, it demonstrates his gift for timeless melody.

Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn & Jones Ltd

(Colgems, 1967)

Dolenz voiced the smash Pleasant Valley Sunday, though Nesmith's guitar intro sizzles and the latter takes the lead on five of 13 tracks including What Am I Doing Hangin' Round?, a country rocker featuring Nez at his driest best: "Just a loud mouth Yankee, I went down to Mexico…"

The Birds, The Bees & The Monkees

(Colgems, 1968)

The group had grown apart and were recording separately but still produced an album that conversed with the pop charts (Valleri, Daydream Believer) and the underground, with Nesmith's tongue-twisting Tapioca Tundra – exploring the relationship between performer, audience and song set to Byrdsian guitars – engaging both.

Head

(Colgems, 1968)

Compiled by Jack Nicholson, the album-of-the-movie snaps a group at their subversive best. Some of the band were sniffy about it but Nesmith, fully embracing the project, delivered Circle Sky, a riot of crunchy guitar and hollered vox. In the film, it ends in images of Vietnam, and The Monkees dismembered by the fans. Hysterical? This time, literally.

Instant Replay

(Colgems, 1969)

Their first without Peter Tork, this has slipped under the radar but is ripe for rediscovery thanks to three jewels from Nesmith – the melancholy sunshine pop swoon of Goffin and King's I Won't Be The Same Without Her plus his own While I Cry and Don't Wait For Me, both bruised but beautiful laments.

The Monkees Present

(Colgems, 1969)

The last Monkees album to feature Nesmith until 1996's *Justus*, their eighth is a must-have for Nesmith's Listen To The Band, recorded in Nashville with Charlie McCoy's session aces Area Code 615, and Good Clean Fun – both presaging the country sound he'd explore more fully with the First National Band.

Epilogue…

Although he made an impromptu guest appearance at LA's Greek Theatre in 1986 as part of The Monkees' 20th anniversary tour, Nesmith was missing from 1987's *Pool It!*, but did rejoin in the studio to celebrate their 30th year with 1996's *Justus* (Rhino), remaking Circle Sky and penning Admiral Mike for Micky Dolenz to sing. He returned to mark their half century with 2016's *Good Times!* (Rhino), contributing the touching piano-with-strings ballad I Know What I Know, and also joined in the festivities, breathing new life into standards on 2018's *Christmas Party* (Rhino), The Monkees' studio swan song.

After leaving the Air Force and moving to LA, Nesmith made a couple of small-label singles that went nowhere. By late November 1965, he, Dolenz, Jones – a singer and young veteran of the London theatre with perfect Mod-heartthrob looks – and Tork, an émigré from the Greenwich Village folk scene, were shooting a pilot episode of The Monkees, cast as a perpetually out-of-work band always falling into cartoon-ish mischief and inevitably breaking into song before the credits rolled. It was the relentless cheer and machine-gun repartee of A Hard Day's Night soaked in the Marx Brothers' Duck Soup and packed into a half-hour sitcom grenade.

Dolenz did not encounter Nesmith during the auditions, and he says the four did not all meet until the first wardrobe fitting: "I remember the producers introducing us to each other: 'OK, you guys are The Monkees.'" But he and Nesmith "struck a chord musically," he says, "because he was from Texas, and my mom was from Bastrop [near Austin], so I was brought up with a lot of country music."

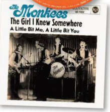
When Micky and Michael sang together in the studio or on the set, it was often in the style of the Everly Brothers. "That was Nez and I – the Everly Monkees," Dolenz says with affection. "We would invariably sing Nez tunes because he was the only one writing at the time."

"He was so much more intelligent than the cute, ersatz, housebroken, simian image…": Nesmith oversees proceedings at RCA studios, November 19, 1967.

"A lot of people asked us, 'How did you get through it without going stark raving mad?' Well, the point is we didn't."
Michael Nesmith

THE MONKEES ALL signed iron-clad contracts they regretted even before the NBC series hit the air at 7.30pm on September 12, 1966. During the run-up to the first LP, Nesmith brought Different Drum, a song he wrote in 1964, to Don Kirshner, the New York publishing executive brought in by Schneider and Rafelson to supervise The Monkees' records. As Dolenz remembers, "Donnie said, 'That's nice, but it's not a Monkees song.' And Nez said, 'Wait a minute, I *am* a Monkee.'" Nesmith had his revenge in 1967 when Different Drum was covered to Top 20 effect by Linda Ronstadt, a singer he knew from the LA scene, with her band the Stone Poneys.

By then, The Monkees were an unprecedented phenomenon, even in a decade that overflowed with them – an explosive synergy of music, medium and mercantile zeal that extended the shock and awe of Beatlemania via the power of Hollywood. The concept challenged a core maxim of rock'n'roll – that great bands are born, not constructed – while the show made overnight stars of the four young men who embodied the illusion. "The Monkees were a band that did not exist except on TV," Dolenz contends. "It wasn't an attempt to be the American Beatles. It was a show about a band that *wanted* to be The Beatles but never made it. It was the struggle for success that endeared it to all the kids in their garages, struggling to make it as a band."



Nesmith fought his way forward early, getting a production credit on *The Monkees* LP for Papa Gene's Blues and Sweet Young Thing. But his laconic charm and dry wit on television – an extension of his personality off camera, Dolenz insists – belied a quick temper and a fighter's spine. In December, 1966, talking to the Saturday Evening Post, Nesmith fired up his discontent over the creative restrictions that came with his celebrity and took special aim at Kirshner for his draconian control of the songs and releases. "The music happens in spite of The Monkees," Nesmith said. "It's what Kirshner wants to do."

A month later, during The Monkees' first concert tour, Nesmith told Schneider and Rafelson that he was quitting after the band learned that Kirshner had compiled, packaged and released *More Of The Monkees* without their knowledge. "The second record was so angering," Tork told Sandoval, as if Kirshner "was almost militarily trying to cut us out of the process." When Kirshner then refused to put a Nesmith song, The Girl I Knew Somewhere, on the B-side of the next single, he was fired.

In February, 1967, The Monkees started recording *Headquarters* with Dolenz on drums and Tork on keyboards, occasional guitars and even banjo.

"That was always very special," Dolenz says of The Girl I Knew Somewhere – a rush of 12-string guitar and harpsichord that he and Nesmith reprised in The Mike And Micky Show – "because that was the first song, after Nez led the palace revolt, where they allowed us to go into the studio and just be ourselves."

"LOOK, I'M 25 YEARS OLD, I HAVE A wife, a child and another on the way," Nesmith once told a Hollywood correspondent for New Musical Express on the set of The Monkees. "I don't have time for your teenage twaddle" – except, as the writer noted, "he didn't say 'twaddle'."

"You've got to understand that talking to me is not the same thing as talking to another guitar player-singer," Nesmith reiterated with more calm after he'd left The Monkees, speaking to a reporter in 1971 while on tour with his stone-country project, the First National Band. "I don't exist at all within the artistic community," he went on. "Steve Stills and I don't hang out. I don't play on Eric Clapton's sessions. I don't want Ringo playing on mine. I usually stay pretty much by myself."

"Nez was never a big socialiser," Dolenz confirms. "He kept to himself a lot. A lot of it had to do with having a wife and kids." Dolenz and Tork, in turn, were fixtures of the high-altitude bohemia in LA's Laurel Canyon. Dolenz, for a time, lived next to Frank Zappa, an avowed Monkees fan, and Tork's home was like "a mini-commune". In the studio, Tork's songs – most of which went unreleased at the time – featured friends such as Stills and Neil Young from Buffalo Springfield. "But Nez," Dolenz says, "was always more of a loner." ➢

© mptvimages/eyevine, Henry Diltz

He was also the first Monkee to release a solo project. Recorded over two days in November, 1967, *The Wichita Train Whistle Sings* featured big-band covers of his Monkees songs and reportedly cost Nesmith $50,000 to make because he paid the nearly 50 musicians double their union scale and catered the sessions with lavish meals and an open bar. Wrecking Crew drummer Hal Blaine, who was on the date, said Nesmith was supposed to pay that money in taxes but chose to write it off in studio costs instead. When the LP came out in July, 1968, it peaked at 144 on Billboard's album chart.

Nesmith's last two years on the job were a slow fade to black: the cancellation of the TV series in 1968; the suicidal Dada of The Monkees' only feature film, Head, a now-legendary evisceration of pop stardom released that November to the sound of no hands clapping; an NBC special, 33 1/3 Revolutions Per Monkee, made in the same contrary spirit and fatally aired in April 1969 in the same time slot as the Academy Awards ceremony over on ABC; the air-play-and-sales wipeout epitomised by Listen To The Band.

"A lot of people asked us, 'How did you get through the whole thing without going stark raving mad?'" Nesmith said, looking back in 1971. "Well, the point is we didn't." When Nesmith bought himself out of his Monkees contract, it cost him every dollar remaining from the money he'd made in the group, leaving him as broke as when he joined but not without a sense of humour. As if the title of his 1972 solo album, *And The Hits Just Keep On Comin'*, wasn't irony enough, the Mercedes in the cover photo, parked in front of a mansion, was a rental. And the house wasn't his.

"The money machine had stopped, so he was looking for things to do," says drummer John Ware, who was playing Different Drum with Ronstadt in a touring version of the Stone Poneys when he met Nesmith at one of that band's rehearsals. "We got to chatting, one thing led to another and I was invited to his house with John London."

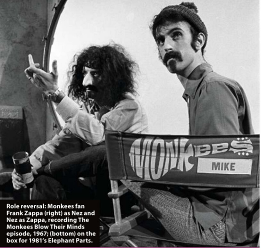
London was the bassist in the Stone Poneys and a veteran of Monkees studio dates who first played with Nesmith in the early '60s when they were classmates at San Antonio College in Texas. The three – with the addition of pedal steel guitarist Orville 'Red' Rhodes, who played on *The Wichita Train Whistle Sings* – became the First National Band.

"We'd sit in his little studio, in his house on Mulholland [Drive], and crank out old country stuff," Ware says. Nesmith also returned to his Monkees songbook, recording new versions of Nine Times Blue, Listen To The Band and Propinquity (I've Just Begun To Care) across the First National Band's three LPs: *Magnetic South*, *Loose Salute* and *Nevada Fighter*, all done in 1970 and all dismal sellers. Joanne, a gorgeous ballad from the first album with Nesmith in memorable falsetto, made the Top 30 in late '70, but the group was in England at the time, unwisely booked on a tour of working men's clubs. They broke up on their return, in the middle of making *Nevada Fighter*. (Nesmith finished it with members of Elvis Presley's TCB Band.)

"Just waiting a couple of years might have been enough," Ware suggests. "You realise how potent those songs were, and his delivery speaks for itself." But Nesmith "was scared in some ways – of doing things like the yodeling [in Joanne]. He would be like, 'Man, I know you hate that.' Where did you get that idea? Keep it up, do more."

"HERE IS A PITHY SUMMATION OF THE SPECIAL loneliness of genius," Nesmith wrote in his 2017 memoir, Infinite Tuesday: An Autobiographical Riff. "Great artists live in a world in which their own excellence does not exist. They are shut out, uniquely, from their defining achievements." Michael Jackson, for example, "could never watch himself dance, at least not the way everyone else on Earth did… Artists may know when they've done something great, but they'll never know what it's like to experience it from the other end."

Nesmith "understood the relationship between himself and The Monkees," Sandoval says, "and what it meant to his career, what he learned from it." But, Sandoval goes on, "You have to look at his mom – a single parent struggling to support her only child, who comes up with an idea. It became the pattern of his life. He was always searching for another path. It made him completely amazing



Role reversal: Monkees fan Frank Zappa (right) as Nez and Nez as Zappa, recording The Monkees Blow Their Minds episode, 1967; (bottom) on the box for 1981's Elephant Parts.

Through The Looking Glass

The best of Nez on screen, by Bill Holdship.

Fairy Tale

(1968; The Monkees TV series)

They could do comedy alongside the best of them – and this episode, Nesmith's favourite, proved it. A zany and hilarious fractured Grimm fairy-tale featuring Nesmith in dual roles as a cobbler and, better still, in drag as Princess Gwen. Bonus points for concluding with a performance of Nez's psychedelic masterwork, Daily Nightly.

The Monkees Blow Their Minds

(1968; The Monkees TV series)

The title says it all. But this second-to-final episode remains most notable for its opening sequence which features Nesmith impersonating Frank Zappa, a longtime champion of the Prefabbers, and vice versa before they destroy a car with a sledgehammer to the strains of Mother People. Pretty hip 'teenybopper' fare for 1968!

Head

(1968; feature film)

The scene of The Monkees' symbolic "image suicide" (as creator Bob Rafelson still maintains). Nez believed they deserved writing credits alongside Jack Nicholson, as they reconfirmed their comedic chops, recreating numerous old-time Hollywood film genres, and their musical chops, performing Nesmith's great Circle Sky live. A commercial failure that's now considered a psychedelic classic.

Elephant Parts

(1981; home video)

Recipient of the first home video Grammy, this hodge-podge of comedy skits and music videos, including Nesmith's much-loved Rio, was a forerunner to PopClips, a 1981 weekly music video programme, and 1985's short-lived Television Parts. Warner Music wanted to buy the rights to PopClips. When Nez refused, they created MTV instead, using his model.

Hey, Hey, It's The Monkees

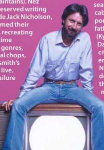
(1997; network TV special)

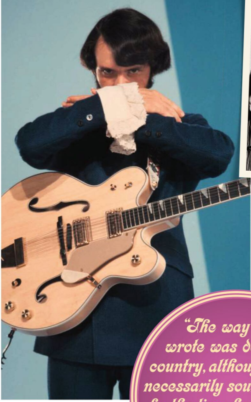
Written and directed by Nez, The Monkees' last team film project recreated the '60s sitcom, presenting them as still trying to "make it" in modern times. Endearing and hilarious in parts, it lampoons them as individuals almost as much as Head did – but in a more loving and tongue-in-cheek way.

Portlandia: 3D Printer

(2014; TV series)

Nesmith turned up in the fourth season of the hipster-roasting cable comedy series, portraying the wealthy father of Portland's mayor (Kyle MacLachlan) who wants Dad to continue covering city expenses. Zaniness ensues. A perfect fit for Nez irreverence, demonstrating that this Renaissance Man maintained his acting flair decades after The Monkees ended.





> "The way Nez wrote was definitely country, although it didn't necessarily sound like that by the time he was done. But he had this great sense of melody."
> **David Kempton**

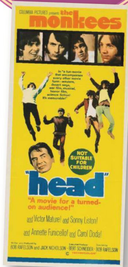
He just may be the one: (clockwise from above left) Nez gives it the eye, August 1967; the First National Band (from left) John London, OJ 'Red' Rhodes, Nesmith, John Ware; (from left) Dolenz, Nesmith, Jones and Tork receive their Hollywood Walk-Of-Fame Star, July 10, 1989; promo poster for 1968's "suicidal Dada" Head.

and completely infuriating. 'You've hit on success, just do this.' 'Nope, gotta do something else now.'"

Jac Holzman, the founder of Elektra Records, briefly went into business with Nesmith after hearing him speak at a radio convention in the early '70s. "He was so much more intelligent than the cute, ersatz, housebroken, simian image – witty, articulate and deeply concerned about how hard it was to get anything going on records," Holzman wrote in his book, Follow The Music. Nesmith got his own imprint through Elektra, Countryside, and produced a 1973 album for the British singer Ian Matthews, *Valley Hi*, before the venture collapsed. The next year, Nesmith started his own multi-media firm, Pacific Arts, becoming its first artist with *The Prison*, a concept album of spaced-country songs accompanied by a novella written by Nesmith and meant to be read while listening to the music.

"He knew what he wanted," says David Kempton, who played synthesizer on *The Prison* and worked with Nesmith on other studio and film projects. "The way he wrote was definitely country, although it didn't necessarily sound like that by the time he was done. But he had this great sense of melody" – and limited patience. If a song or take "wasn't working, very shortly thereafter, he'd say, 'OK, I'm getting bored. Let's do something else.'"

Nesmith spent his '70s and '80s on parallel



tracks, making highly regarded solo albums with cerebral titles – 1977's *From A Radio Engine To The Photon Wing*; 1979's *Infinite Rider On The Big Dogma* – while applying his crossover lessons from The Monkees in television initiatives such as the 1980 Nickelodeon series, PopClips, a show entirely devoted to music videos (a year before the launch of MTV), and the Grammy-winning music-and-comedy programme, Elephant Parts. In 1985, Nesmith was back on NBC with a variety series, Michael Nesmith In Television Parts, that featured pre-superstar appearances by Jerry Seinfeld and Whoopi Goldberg with music from Rosanne Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis, among others.

That left little time or inclination for Monkees reunions. "He had a coming-and-going relationship with the whole Monkees project, and he talked about it openly," says Dolenz, who continued in film and TV after The Monkees ended and produced segments of Television Parts for Nesmith. "I remember when I went to the set for a visit, people were wearing T-shirts that had the words 'Monkee Jokes' and a big red circle with a line through it" – no Monkee jokes.

Sandoval says that in the mid '90s, before ➢

Henry Diltz, Chester Simpson, Getty (3)

"Nez was always more of a loner": Nesmith in the studio, 1971, crafting his softly philosophical cosmic country.

Hat Off!

Nesmith's post-Monkee manoeuvres, surveyed by Andrew Male.

Magnetic South

(RCA, 1970)

A statement of intent recorded for RCA Nashville, Nesmith's solo debut utilised crack Monkees session players to craft a series of softly philosophical 'cosmic country' ballads, defined by the keening pedal steel of OJ 'Red' Rhodes, Nesmith's own easy-flowing lyrics, and a voice that slides from soothing croon to lonesome Jimmie Rodgers yodel.

Loose Salute

(RCA, 1970)

Buoyed by the commercial failure of *Magnetic South*, the second First National Band LP is more defiantly eclectic and playful, moving from exquisite covers (I Fall To Pieces) to curious Latino funk (Tengo Amore; Hello Lady) goofy rockers (Dedicated Friend) and a handful of plaintive, metaphysical love songs (Conversations; Lady Of The Valley).

Nevada Fighter

(RCA, 1971)

Recorded while The First National Band and Nesmith's own personal life were falling to pieces, this is a surprisingly coherent LP, the first side a mini-concept album about Nesmith's own infidelities and side two a collection of masterful country covers assisted by Elvis and Wrecking Crew alumni James Burton, Joe Osborn and Ron Tutt.

Tantamount To Treason Vol. 1

(RCA, 1972)

Rather than address problems in his own life, Nesmith changed his band (although Red Rhodes was retained). Again it's a side of originals and another of covers but the sound is wilder, trippier, with heavier drums, electronic effects and hallucinatory detours. Stand-outs include the euphoric Wax Minute and the ecstatic dreamscapes of In The Afternoon and You Are My One.

And The Hits Just Keep On Comin'

(RCA, 1972)

In defiant reaction to RCA asking for more hits, Nesmith re-recorded a collection of his old songs (all composed prior to or during his time in The Monkees) with just himself and Red Rhodes. The result is gorgeous: an intimate, nuanced collection of duets between voice and pedal steel that taps deep into that infinite well of acute country melancholy.

Pretty Much Your Standard Ranch Stash

(RCA, 1973)

His sixth and final RCA LP, recorded with the house band formed for his ill-fated new label, Countryside, this is one of the few solo records Nesmith regarded in a positive light. It's certainly his most cohesive – a warm, blissed-out collection of California country lullabies that found Papa Nez happily singing in the face of disaster.

The Prison

(Pacific Arts, 1974)

Written in the depths of despair, while devouring the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, *The Prison* is an act of music therapy. Much maligned, it's actually a small gem, a roughly recorded assemblage of Tex-Mex peyote country wrapped in the cool, New Age robes of ARP synthesizer, congas, Roland drum machine and a yogi choir.

Tropical Campfires

(Pacific Arts, 1992)

After a 13-year break from recording, Nesmith reunited with Red Rhodes one last time for a knowingly playful armchair safari of country exotica and hotel-lobby Americana. It might initially sound throwaway, but in songs such as Juliana and Moon Over The Rio Grande it contains some of his finest work.

Cosmic Partners: The McCabe's Tapes

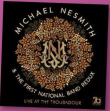
(7A Records, 2019)

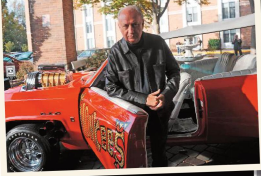
Recorded on two-track stereo at McCabe's Guitar Shop, Santa Monica, on a mini-tour to promote …*Standard Ranch Stash*, this is an acutely bittersweet listen, a road-weary and industry-battered Nez playing in perfect harmony with Red Rhodes, Colin Cameron and Danny Lane, pouring all his heartache into a mournful, solo best-of.

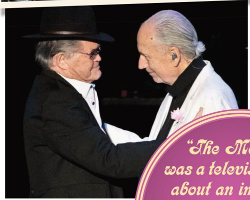
Live At the Troubadour

(7A Records, 2018)

In early 2018 the 75-year-old Nesmith assembled a new First National Band with his son Christian for a handful of shows including one at Los Angeles' famed '60s hangout. It's a bright, joyous, muscular set that finds a re-energised Nesmith finally embracing a period of his life he had previously tried to erase or forget.





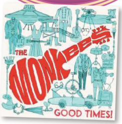


Good time guy: (clockwise from top left) "Wanna ride?" Nez at the 2017 Chiller Theatre Expo, New Jersey; Stetson-sonic, SIR Studios, LA, 2017; on-stage with old pal Dolenz for the 55th Anniversary Farewell Tour, November 14, 2021.

> *"The Monkees was a television show about an imaginary band. But Nez always said that it was like Pinocchio becoming a real boy."*
> **Micky Dolenz**

< the Rhino label purchased the rights to The Monkees' catalogue, Schneider and Rafelson – the original brain trust – offered to sell it to Nesmith: "They went to him and said, 'Do you want to buy the records and films? You always wanted control of this stuff.' He told me that he thought about it for a day and decided he didn't want to have Davy calling him, asking where his royalties were. Which, by the way, Michael did. He would call Rhino and say, 'Royalties are a day late. You're in breach of contract.' But business was important to him, and how it was done was especially important to him."

NESMITH SIGNED ON FOR THE 1996 album, *Justus*, the first with all four members since *Head*, and directed a 1997 television special, Hey, Hey, It's The Monkees, but generally left Dolenz, Jones and Tork to be The Monkees on periodic tours, fraught at times with dissension and public arguments. "It was always misconstrued that Michael was the sore point," Sandoval says. "The reality was they didn't have an internal leader or management system that worked for them."



Ironically, Nesmith returned for 2016's *Good Times!*, a 50th anniversary album (with a posthumous appearance by Jones) that Sandoval, who co-produced with the late Adam Schlesinger of Fountains Of Wayne, likens to "taking my pets to the vet. You can't really explain why it was going to be good for them." Songs largely came from outside writers – "Like an old-fashioned Don Kirshner-Boyce and Hart record" – but this time from qualified fans such as Paul Weller, Weezer's Rivers Cuomo and Ben Gibbard of Death Cab For Cutie. Gibbard came to a session with a photo of his father during the Vietnam War, holding two Monkees albums he'd taken with him. Andy Partridge of XTC, who wrote for the album, revealed that as a boy, he entered a contest in Monkee Monthly; won 10 pounds; and spent it on his first tape recorder so he could start writing songs.

For all of his mixed emotions about the history, Nesmith was consistent in his defence of his bandmates. "Do me the gracious favour of not pointing me out as the most talented Monkee," he told Melody Maker in 1974. "David and Peter and Micky were very heavy cats… There wasn't a dummy among them.

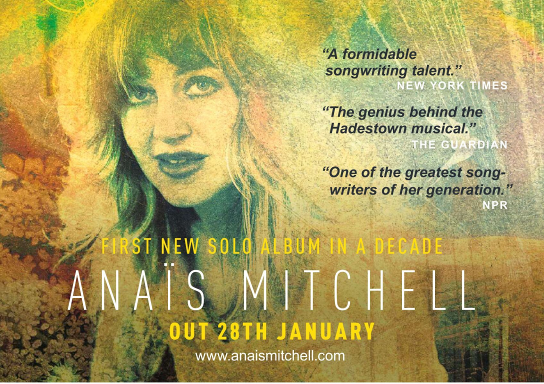
"I didn't get along with them," Nesmith conceded. "None of us got along, because we were all very different, but they weren't fools."

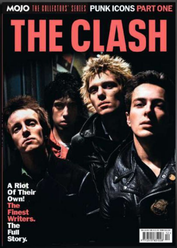
"If you think of it as a band," Dolenz says now, "it gets very confusing. The Monkees was a television show about a band, an imaginary band. But Nez always said that because we could play – and you had to play and sing to get through the casting – it was like Pinocchio becoming a real boy. That was the interesting story – fantasy becoming reality, art becoming life."

On the final tour, after he and Dolenz played Good Clean Fun, Nesmith would tell the crowds, "I told you I'd come back and here I am," to a roar of applause. "He'd have this huge smile on his face," Sandoval says. "He was especially excited by the really young people in the audience. He would spot them, write a note and have one of us pass it down to them."

It said, "Hello from the stage, Nez." Ⓜ

Getty (3), Camera Press





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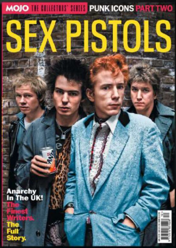

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JIM IRVIN, STARTLED BY THE CLARITY OF MPS, REISSUES P96

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Blue Planet

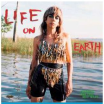
New Orleans wanderer goes into their head to make sense of the world.
By **Victoria Segal**. Illustration by **Carne Griffiths**.

Hurray For The Riff Raff

★★★★

Life On Earth

NONESUCH. CD/DL/LP



THERE WAS a moment during the recording of Hurray For The Riff Raff's seventh album when Alynda Segarra realised that they might not be able to save the world. As the pandemic raged and the US elections tumbled into Capitol-trashing anarchy, the singer looked out from the joyful creativity of producer Brad Cook's North Carolina studio and had a revelation. "I just felt, I'm an artist and I'm in the exact place I'm supposed to be, doing exactly what I should do," Segarra tells MOJO. "I think I needed to be humbled – I was taking on a little too much and was trying to save the world in my own way… I'm just another little human doing my thing and this is what I have to offer." Even more significantly, given the profoundly personal nature of *Life On Earth*, they started to understand the fit-your-own-oxygen-mask-first theory of activism – that they didn't need to feel guilty or selfish for taking a break, for living their own life. After all, laughs Segarra, "you only get this one."

"Life On Earth is a delicate, tender record full of gentle empathy, of lines that ring with the truth of shared experience."

As a result, *Life On Earth* is a remarkably tender, delicate record – you might even call it an act of self-care, albeit one that can be generously handed on to the listener. It's full of gentle empathy, of lines that ring with the truth of shared experience – "it's been a terrible news week," on Saga, for example, is a masterpiece of conversational concision. Even the most explicitly political song on the record, Precious Cargo, feels intimate rather than lofty or grand. Warm synths (a trace of Segarra's love of Beverly Glenn-Copeland); low trip-hop beats; the spoken testimony of one of the men Segarra used to visit in an ICE facility when working with campaigners Freedom For Immigrants: it all turns a news story over there into a flesh-and-blood, face-to-face encounter right here.

For a "little human", Segarra has never been afraid of the big picture – unsurprisingly, perhaps, for somebody who left New York at 17 to jump trains across America, winding up playing jazz and blues with New Orleans' rich community of street musicians. Hurray For The Riff Raff's application of punk ethics to Americana, the sound that emerges when you grow up loving Kathleen Hanna, Lou Reed and Woody Guthrie – resulted in music that was both in tune with the old ways and committed to shaking them at the roots. On 2014's *Small Town Heroes*, for example, The Body Electric called out the murder ballad, its misogyny fixed by the seemingly indelible varnish of tradition – "well, Delia's gone but I'm settling the score". 2017's *The Navigator*, meanwhile, illuminated Segarra's Puerto Rican heritage, a fable of belonging told through the eyes of a teenage Nuyorican wanderer called Navita.

At a time when so many people have been forced to live without their usual distractions and coping mechanisms, however, *Life On Earth* feels like a record that turns its gaze back inwards. There is space for break-up songs (Rosemary Tears) and self-lacerating love songs (nightqueen, featuring writer Ocean Vuong), but, most of all, these songs reflect what happens when there's no escaping your thoughts, the internal fight that occurs when physical flight is no longer an option.

It begins with Wolves, a song that sounds like a beautiful electro-gospel lullaby yet declares, "it's not safe at home any more… run babe/You know how to run". It's Born To Run with post-traumatic stress, a feeling that runs through Pierced Arrows ("I keep on running for the blue/I duck my head and travel through") and Pointed At The Sun ("I'm needing just to sit still/I know there's nowhere to run"). This is not frenetic, hurtling music: Jupiter's Dance or nightqueen are airy electronic pop, a long evolutionary trip from the band's early boxcar sway – yet it complements this sense of emotion sickness, of being forced to turn over issues inside your head because there's nowhere else to take them.

Even the consolations are double-edged. Rhododendron, written with My Morning Jacket's Jim James, pays tribute to the plant life they see around them – "Morning glory/Naked boys" (the latter is a folk name for meadow saffron, apparently) – finding comfort in the thought of being reclaimed by vegetation. It is, by contrast, the most obviously urban song on the record, a gum-snapping Roadrunner delivered with impeccably snarling attitude. Even then, it trails into sadness – "Everything I have is gone/And I don't know what it'll take to carry on", the flowers turning out to be foxglove and deadly nightshade. (The list of plant life chimes ominously with Precious Cargo's list of Louisiana detention centres). The title track, meanwhile, with its weary tangled clarinet, sounds like an endless funeral procession, humanity heading off into the climate-changed desert in one wavering line: "Life on earth is long".

It's Saga that best catches the combination of despair and resilience that marbles *Life On Earth*, however. Written while Professor Christine Blasey Ford was giving her testimony against US Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, it echoes another song of running and escape – Hounds Of Love – yet it refuses to be felled by memories of past trauma. "I'll just make it through this week," sings Segarra. It's a modest aim, but sometimes, they imply, that's all you can do. Day by day, step by step.

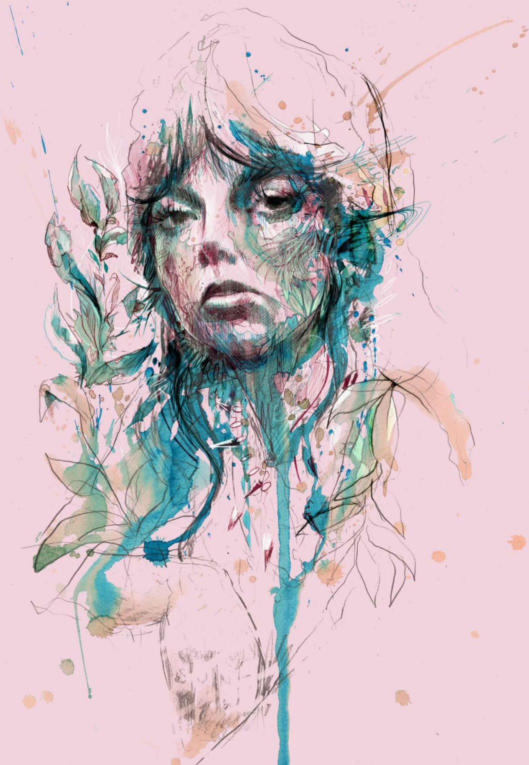
Life On Earth ends with a field recording of Segarra's favourite pandemic tree, an oak adorned with wind chimes in a New Orleans park. It's a touching reminder that some things do endure, that survival is possible. Hurray For The Riff Raff might not be able to save the world, but *Life On Earth* is a compassionate, humane record at a time when it can only be a gift. Little humans everywhere, just doing what they can, will be grateful.

Alamy

BACK STORY: PRECIOUS CARGO

● Before the pandemic, Segarra visited two men in Louisiana ICE detention centres, one of whom speaks on Precious Cargo ("We came here to save our lives"). He is now "living his life", but has the situation improved? "Definitely what we were promised I do not see has been delivered," says Segarra. "There are still thousands of people in detention. A lot of these places are for profit – there are concepts that are way beyond my expertise but I know the way we are dealing with immigration in this country is still very cruel."

ALYNDA SPEAKS! SEGARRA ON ASYLUM SEEKERS, THE CLASH AND THE JOY OF GARDENING…



Hurray For The Riff Raff's Alynda Segarra: channelling "the punk inside".

"There's powerful plant life in New Orleans."

Alynda Segarra speaks to **Victoria Segal**.

***Life On Earth* is a vast title.**

"I like to push myself!"

You have different voices on the album – writer and poet Ocean Vuong on Nightqueen, an asylum seeker on Precious Cargo, even a New Orleans oak on Kin. Why did you need them?

"I actually wanted a lot more, but I needed to edit myself. I have a collection of a lot of different speeches. Throughout the pandemic, I've gotten so into listening to podcasts while I walk because there's just so much loneliness. It felt really important to listen to conversations and hear ideas. I wanted to add these little snippets of what helped me. I really like just having voices around. Sometimes I have just TV on but I feel podcasts are less brain-killing. I love this one called Death Sex & Money; there's another one called Living Myth with a guy called Michael Meade. He's an expert on mythology from all over the world and he just riffs on different mythological stories and connects them to current events, and I love all that."

Who is the voice on Precious Cargo?

"That's my friend who I visited when he was in detention. He's now out and living his life. I thought it was important to see what he wanted to tell the world since I was telling so much of what I learned from him about his journey and his survival. The point of Precious Cargo was to tell a human story that everyone can relate to, not even make it a political issue: 'this is someone's *life*! This is their youth!' This person was in their twenties and a year was stolen from him all because he was seeking asylum. And it's a story of incredible survival. To cross this land in the name of surviving, I think is really admirable. Talk about mythology – it's a hero's journey. I've noticed in my life people think it's really… *cute*, almost, that I ran away and hopped trains – but I was doing illegal things, trespassing on lines. But when I do it, it's OK, it's this romantic story – so why isn't it OK for this person?"

Did you have musical touchstones during recording?

"I was thinking a lot about The Clash, I was thinking about MIA, I was thinking about Beverly Glenn-Copeland. I was putting all those worlds together – then, of course, I love Bad Bunny. I was learning from them: Bad Bunny seems like he's having so much fun and he's generating a lot of energy. With The Clash, I wanted that urgency. There's like a punk spirit. You could be playing an acoustic guitar and that will come out, the punk inside."

Why did you want a tree to have the last word?

"Because that's who I went to for healing and for wisdom. People got very called to the natural world, got into gardening, saw the world in a new light, and that was certainly my experience. I looked around and thought, 'Why do I feel so lonely and afraid when there's all this powerful plant life around me in New Orleans?' And it's survived so much – it's survived pummelling hurricanes, or it dies and it's reborn. It just keeps going. And I think that's another theme of the album – death. I think it's a part of life and I don't think it's the end."

Boris

★★★★

W

SACRED BONES. CD/DL/LP

Japanese noise trio swap face-melting for brow-stroking.

From a mid-'90s grounding in stoner-hardcore doom-metal, Boris have routinely diversified, embracing art-noise, shoegaze, Floydiana and even contemporary pop-rock (on 2011's anomalous *New Album*), with feedback hymnals a speciality. But after the barely relenting heaviosity of June's *No LP*, *W* feels like a peace offering – signalling wildly to listeners previously kept at bay by the cult vibes and the racket. Beyond a token remnant of the latter in the sludge riffing of The Fallen, this is a record of delicately sculpted *nuages*, all wispily sung by guitar/keyboard-player Wata. Standouts include the disembodied My Bloody Valentine of I Want To Go To The Side Where You Can Touch…, the opiated Cocteau Twins of Icelina and, best of all, Drowning By Numbers, a swirling black hole of eerie, visceral crypto-funk. In the gorgeous Invitation, Wata sings what translates into English as, "The noise is listening to you" – as if it's making allowances. Maybe, this time, it is.

Danny Eccleston

Cate Le Bon

★★★★

Pompeii

MEXICAN SUMMER. CD/DL/LP/MC

John Grant and Deerhunter producer goes with her own distinctive flow on sixth LP.

You might expect a record born in solitude to represent a newly intense distillation of its creator's sound. *Pompeii*, Cate Le Bon's follow-up to 2019's *Reward*, initially suggests the opposite is true: isolation leads to a damping of overt quirks and flourishes and a greyscale wash of synths and introspection. Yet while the bright volatile reds and oranges of Le Bon's earlier records (not to mention Drinks, her hair-trigger collaboration with Tim Presley) have cooled to something darker, she still presses a wild array of musical patterns and textures into *Pompeii*'s surfaces. Imaginary Euro-pop hit French Boys, the title track's delicate John Cale-at-the-circus whirl, Dirt On The Bed's experimental-theatre sax: the corners of these songs might not snag quite as dangerously as before, but there's no blunting of the fascination Le Bon's song-writing so expertly exerts.

Victoria Segal

Erin Rae

★★★★

Lighten Up

THIRTY TIGERS. CD/DL/LP

Positive indie country vibes from a fresh Nashville voice.

It's been three years since Nashville-based Erin Rae's very modern indie country debut *Putting On Airs*. *Lighten Up* continues her journey in the vein of Kacy & Clayton or Marlon Williams, with a hint of namesake-adjacent Lana Del Rey's gauzy pop thrown in for good measure. Drafting in friend Kevin Morby for the Nancy & Lee-style duet Can't See Stars (albeit with not nearly enough 'Lee'), Meg Duffy on occasional guitar and Andrew Combs for a rare co-write on highlight Lighten Up And Try, Rae puts a positive spin on just about everything that people have been bitching about for the past two years, finding joy in her enforced slowing down and taking stock. As refreshing as *Putting On Airs* was, *Lighten Up* takes its sometimes melancholy frown, turns it upside down and delivers an infectious beam of musical sunshine.

Andy Fyfe

Nick Cave & Warren Ellis

★★★★

La Panthère Des Neiges

INVADA. DL

Workaholic soundtrack duo explore the Tibetan highlands.

Notwithstanding some of his more phantasmagorical narratives, a track called Les Yaks still looks like one of the odder entries in the Nick Cave canon. Explanation comes from context rather than his subconscious: this latest Cave & Ellis soundtrack accompanies a French-made documentary about the animals of the Tibetan plateau, with the tightest focus on the legendarily elusive snow leopard. It's "absolutely beautiful", keen naturalist Ellis assured us in MOJO 338, and this album certainly suggests as much. Les Yaks turns out to be surprisingly sinister, but the pensive negotiations of piano, strings, flute and Vietnamese bagpipes here are generally prettier and less ominous than many of the duo's scores. Most significantly, Cave sings. We Are Not Alone, a meditation on elusive nature that could easily be read as a *Ghosteen*-style reckoning with the departed (in spite of the lyrics being written by the film's protagonist, Sylvain Tesson), is an authentically great Cave song; don't miss it hiding in the soundtrack wilds.

John Mulvey

Spiritualized

★★★★

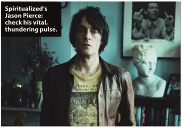
Everything Was Beautiful

FAT POSSUM. CD/DL/LP

Jason Pierce's ninth LP under this alias: artwork broadcasts '44 mins' economy.

As Jason Pierce revealed in MOJO 338, Fat Possum's Matthew Johnson advised him against his first outing since 2012's *Sweet Heart Sweet Light* (pt. 2 of his 'infirmary diptych') being a double-album, instead splitting the material between 2018's above-par *And Nothing Hurt*, and this equally sprightly standalone. Since 1997's benchmark *Ladies And Gentlemen…*, Spiritualized records have occasionally sounded painstaking in their detail, even clinical; the strength of these latest two is that they *feel* live, like a riotous assembly of (chiefly) guitars, horns and voices (even while, ironically, budgets dictated they were collaged on ProTools). Much of *Everything Was Beautiful* has a vital, thundering pulse: anchored on an insistent rock'n'roll riff, Best Thing You Never Had builds to a tremendous din before a trombone solo arises magnificently from the soup. Some fantastic songs aboard, too, including Always Together With You's Daniel Johnston-style naked expression of fatherly/romantic commitment, and a country-soul ballad, Crazy, complete with pedal steel. So, yes: utterly beautiful, as advertised.

Andrew Perry



Spiritualized's Jason Pierce: check his vital, thundering pulse.

Indie Film Lab

Big Thief: stylistically diverse and admirably ambitious.

Game of poems

Close-knit Brooklynites return with renewed ambition after three members made solo albums in 2020. By **James McNair.**

Big Thief

★★★★

Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe In You

4AD. CD/DL/LP

IN ONE OF two free-form band biographies accompanying Big Thief's fifth album, their friend Mat Davidson, a guest here on fiddle and more, summons a certain Austrian poet. "Works of art are of an infinite loneliness and with nothing to be so little reached as criticism," he writes, quoting Rainer Maria Rilke. "Only love can grasp and hold and fairly judge them."

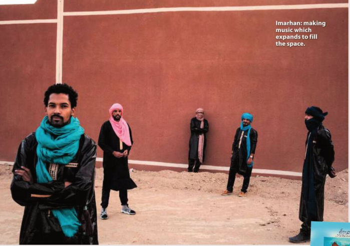
It's unintentional, perhaps, but Davidson's citation feels like a disclaimer. An amorphous, stylistically diverse record you must savour and digest slowly, like a python eating a deer, the mystically-titled *Dragon…* was recorded in four different locations with four very different engineers, its 20 questing songs culled from a possible 45 and speaking enigmatically of death, infinity and the celestial.

Four Berklee College Of Music graduates eschewing the studied or musically verbose, singer and chief songwriter Adrianne Lenker, guitarist Buck Meek, bassist Max Oleartchik and drummer James Krivchenia instead exude tangible devotion to their mission, namely to "record a rambling account of growth as individuals, musicians and chosen family." It might seem self-aggrandising when Big Thief lay claim to a bond of "pure magic", but there are moments here when the table levitates. Witness the ethereal title track with its bells and played icicles, or the tack-piano adorned waltz Sparrow, wherein Lenker's strange, stark images – "threading the blood through the apple" etc – pack cumulative, bewitching power.

Bare-bones evocation Change is instantly captivating too, her precious voice exerting magnetic pull. It's one of several songs that tumble in with the happenstance immediacy of field recordings, the mood and the moment all-important. As Big Thief get their heads together in upstate New York, Topanga Canyon, California, the Colorado Rockies and, finally, Tucson, Arizona, the album's relaxed eat, live and create together vibes are unmistakable. We hear Lenker tell her dog Oso "it's music", lest the beast be sniffy about Time Escaping's struck lattice of gamelan-like guitars. Elsewhere, her kid brother Noah twangs a carefree jaw-harp on rustic country dance, Spud Infinity.

It was drummer James Krivchenia, also producer here, who suggested Big Thief shouldn't fret about stylistic cohesion, his rationale being that this would give a truer, broader picture of the band's ongoing journey. This figures, of course, but good as the Edie Brickell & New Bohemians-ish pop bouncer Little Things and very '80s, Cocteau Twins-like Flower Of Blood are, they do jar somewhat in this context, like time-travelling gate-crashers in a mostly bucolic landscape.

All that said, *Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe In You* is both an album of admirable ambition and a mantra worth repeating until its mysteries are revealed. And if you're looking down, Rainer Maria Rilke, I hope you'll countenance this attempt at a loving critique.



Imarhan: making music which expands to fill the space.

It's only rock'n'roll?

Algerian Tuaregs' third album adds to the sweep of an epic history lesson, reckons **David Hutcheon**.

Imarhan
★★★★
Aboogi
CITY SLANG. CD/DL/LP

ARE YOU READY for the country? The further we get from the initial surprise that the 'desert blues' exist, the more each album reveals about the lives of the protagonists. Rather than setting up the music as a scene in which competing yet complementing bands joust for a hearing – *à la* Britpop, or whatever – the Tuaregs' records coalesce to form a single narrative, different parts of one story delivered in varying voices yet, ultimately, unified. A Mahabharata or Ramayana for the Tamashek people who once reigned unchallenged across northern Africa.

"We give space to the wind, the sun and the sand," says Sadam, the band's nominal leader. "We want to express their colours through music." That this synaesthesia is the goal will be no surprise to anyone used to the atmospheres Tinariwen argued to have present on their more expansive albums, once they could drag producers out to Kidal to record, surrounded by the heat-shattered rock, sand, aquifers and oasis that shape their view of the world, with its vast skies and 360-degree horizons.

Imarhan's 11 songs come wrapped in a soundscape; a surround-sound version would have the guitars and vocals central, but dust devils and translucent scorpions in the corners of your room, a sweet tea bubbling away and, after dark, the shuffling of a hyena behind the settee. The music expands to fill the space. That said, a slightly prosaic complaint: there are at least a couple of songs that end just as the listener is settling down for 30 minutes of endless aboogi… sorry, "endless boogie" …and you know the producer must be sitting on tapes that would make awesome 12-inch extended mixes. Just saying…

Anyway, that's the spiel, the "why you should listen"; you probably have a decent idea what this album sounds like, who it sounds quite like. Imarhan eschew the robes and traditions of Tinariwen – they wear jeans and leather jackets and heavy boots, because these are practical in the Sahara – but guests include Abdallah and Japonais from that pioneering outfit, and they sing a song, Tindjatan, about a defeat the Tuaregs suffered at the hands of the French before colonisation. They don't have an axe hero like Mdou Moctar but they do get Gruff Rhys in to sing about kinship in Welsh (Adar Newlan).

Aboogi – a trad Tuareg term for a semi-permanent dwelling – may only be the latest chapter in a humungous epic, something that will make total sense finally viewed from several centuries' distance, but it's a reminder that walls and boundaries exist primarily in the head, that we all have a huge space in which to exist. It feels comforting right now. A small part of something bigger. Just like us.

Empath
★★★★
Visitor
FAT POSSUM. CD/DL/LP

Second album from Perfect Pussy alumni. A delight.

The sleeve of *Visitor* is a handsome portrait of the interior of a hipster house. The paintwork is rose pink and margarine yellow, all the doors are ajar, but the house is empty and has a sinister chill about it. Which is the exact opposite feeling you get listening to the album. The Philadelphia quartet's second has a deep warmth emanating from it, a communal spirit is scattered over these 11 songs. Some straightforward pop melodies are wrapped in a coat of 'found' sounds and a production veneer (aided by Unknown Mortal Orchestra's Jake Portrait) which gives the soundscape a cinematic depth. Moreover, a levity underpins the psychedelic jumble, with songs like Born 100 Times, the B-52's, Bell and Diamond Eyelids summoning up the spirit of a squally J Mascis guitar solo or a freeform jam by The B-52's.

Priya Elan

Abiodun Oyewole
★★★
Gratitude
AFAR. CD/DL/LP

Spiritual matters dominate Last Poets founder's first solo LP in 27 years.

The political power of Abiodun Oyewole's verses on Last Poets' self-titled 1970 debut laid the groundwork for hip-hop. While the tipping point then was Martin Luther King's assassination, his belief in poetry as an agent of social change has never faltered. He sounds as authoritative as ever on *Gratitude*, whether undercutting his sweeping personifications of Harlem and Brooklyn with sampled strings and old-school vibes or showing off his crooning capabilities on a two-way with Def Poetry Jam star Jessica Care Moore. Not everything works. Overly fussy backings to My Life and To Begin do him few favours and actively overwhelm his reflections on Occupy. All Oyewole needs to make his humanistic points resonate is a rattle of hand drums, as A Poem and What I Want To See demonstrate.

Andy Cowan

St. Paul & The Broken Bones
★★★
The Alien Coast
ATO. CD/DL/LP

Alabama octet offer "Fever dream convergence of soul and psychedelia, stoner metal and funk."

Inspired by everything from Greek mythology to dystopian sci-fi to 17th-century Italian sculpture, this Birmingham, AL group's fourth LP journeys far off-piste. The thread that binds is frontman Paul Janeway's falsetto, a formidable thing which seems to channel Charles & Eddie's Charles Pettigrew. Guitarist Browan Lollar is a deft and imaginative colourist across the album's melange of styles, and a brace of atmospheric, texture-rich postcards (Popcorn Ceiling; Love Letter From A Red Roof Inn) conjure Prince circa *Around The World In A Day*. If the forward-looking, ever exploratory production just occasionally outguns the songwriting (Tin Man Love lacks coherence, not a heart), Daft Punk-ish floor-filler The Last Dance is unimpeachable, a defiant shimmy toward the apocalypse. "I don't care if people watching me think I'm kind of strange", sings Janeway, appealingly lost in music.

James McNair

Samana
★★★★
All One Breath
PAPERHOUSE MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

Progressive folk duo drill deep into melancholia on sequel to 2019's *Ascension*.

An unplanned, extended stay in France hastened the arrival of this Welsh duo's second LP. Working to a much looser brief than its predecessor's ruminations of love, loss and death, Rebecca Rose Harris and Franklin Mockett culled *All One Breath* from over 60 songs whose bare-bones arrangements reflect what was at their disposal. It works to their favour on the meditative deep reflections of Melancholy Heat, swooning wanderlust of Live For The Road and subtle harmonising of The Glory Of Love (a close cousin of Velvet Underground's Oh! Sweet Nuthin'). Just when the album seems locked into an alluring cycle of rustic guitar creak and murmured vocals – think Nico, Jarboe, Mazzy Star – the spare piano-led title track and squalling finale to Patience puncture the reverie, if not its anaesthetising reach.

Andy Cowan

Brent Cobb

★★★★

And Now, Let's Turn To Page…

OL' BUDDY. CD/DL/LP

Country gospel, just like Johnny and Loretta used to make.

Country and gospel have been kissing cousins for as long as they have both existed, although in recent decades the ties have loosened somewhat. Not for Brent Cobb, however, who was spurred into making this album after a car crash last year. As he points out, making a gospel album was almost a rite of passage for artists such as Johnny Cash, Glen Campbell, Bobbie Gentry or Loretta Lynn. Tackling eight traditional songs, he plays Just A Closer Walk With Thee and Old Rugged Cross relatively straight, but turns the likes of We Shall Rise and Are You Washed In The Blood? into glorious Southern boogie, replete with screaming guitar solos. The one new song, When It's My Time, fits so snugly into the tracklisting that it reinforces Cobb's deep understanding of both this music and his place in its story.

Andy Fyfe

cuts are the chanson-leaning Artemis and Exist For Love, the delicate Heathens and moody Susanne Sundfør-esque closer A Little Place Called The Moon. It's hard not to wonder whether Aksnes has been crowded-out on her own album.

Kieron Tyler

Jethro Tull

★★★

The Zealot Gene

INSIDE OUT. CD/DL/LP

Ian Anderson's first record since his solo *Homo Erraticus* in 2014.

It's called a group album, but these days with a sole composer whose voice and trilling flute take centre stage, Anderson solo records and Tull albums are hard to separate. The good news is that, after his overwrought historical concept album in 2014, here are 12 less erratic songs on diverse subjects: polarised politics, drunken ladettes in Cardiff, and – returning to an *Aqualung* theme – the Old Testament Jehovah gets a good kicking. Lyrics can be opaque: Mrs Tibbets must be the first song about the destruction of Hiroshima to feature repeated references to Eccles cake. The rockier tunes need louder guitars and it's the folkier moments with mandolin, Irish whistle and accordion that shine brightest. There's not much here to rival very top Tull

(In Brief Visitation and Mine Is The Mountain come close) but then nothing that sullies the venerable brand either.

John Bungey

The Jazz Butcher

★★★★

The Highest In The Land

TAPETE. CD/DL/LP

Underrated songwriter supplies his own effortlessly swinging epitaph.

Intimations of mortality run rife through Pat Fish's fourteenth and final Jazz Butcher LP. But whether "screaming at the ambulance" with his name on it on Goodnight Sweetheart, watching "existential threats pile up like mashed potato snow" on Hammond-laced singalong Running On Fumes or catching a "one-way ticket to a pit of council lime" amid the wry, semi-rapped ruminations of Time, they're far from mawkish or self-pitying. Fish was clear from extensive cancer treatment when producer Lee Russell captured the most natural sounding album of his career. From the jangly jazz fusion of Melanie Hargreaves' Father's

Jaguar to the carefree guitar pop of Sea Madness and shimmering lap-steel lamentation of Never Give Up – a heartbreaker, up with his very best – fresh triumphs override metatextual nods to glories past.

Andy Cowan

Miles Kane

★★★

Change The Show

BMG. CD/DL/LP/MC

Fourth solo album from Last Shadow Puppet.

Miles Kane's last solo album, 2018's *Coup de Grace*, trod water in the wake of some wholly inappropriate comments he made to a female interviewer. Weeks before *Coup De Grace*'s release he'd swapped Los Angeles for Bethnal Green, but now he's pushed his sound forwards into more mature, less swaggering territory and recruited non-threatening guests Paul O'Grady (in Lily Savage mode for the spoken introduction to Don't Let It Get You Down) and Corinne Bailey Rae on the brisk Nothing's Ever Gonna Be Good Enough. There's unusual self-awareness on Coming Of Age and, throughout, a dreamy, echo-drenched production which evokes both early Four Seasons and Phil Spector's work with Dion. As a result, the perky Caroline and the lovely opener Tears Are Falling ("I'm done with playing the fool")

have the space to breathe and blossom. He's slowly rehabilitating himself.

John Aizlewood

Sea Power

★★★

Everything Was Forever

ROUGH TRADE. CD/DL/LP/MC

First album since they were British Sea Power. Their seventh in all.

Since "it's possible to misapprehend the name British Sea Power" (although who might "misapprehend" remains unclear), British Sea Power became Sea Power in August. Their first LP since 2017's patchy *Let The Dancers Inherit The Party* finds the sextet returning to their complex basics. There's the richly layered instrumentation, there's musical uplift and there are Yan Scott Wilkinson's vocals, distant but concerned in the manner of Psychedelic Fur Richard Butler. They hurl curveballs such as the twin-kling guitar motif that propels Fire Escape In The Sea and the almost Giorgio Moroder-esque backing to Folly. It's an exhilarating listen, and when they rock out on Two Fingers it's genuinely thrilling, while the stentorian We Only Want To Make You Happy moves like a musical galleon. They still struggle for hooks, though: solve that problem and they'd be almost perfect.

John Aizlewood

Aurora

★★★

The Gods We Can Touch

DECCA. CD/DL/LP

Third album from Norway's Billie Eilish-influencing wonder voice.

Aurora Aksnes's remarkable, malleable voice and smart song-writing inspired Billie Eilish to write her own songs. With this in the rear view mirror, the charismatic Norwegian now has chartbuster written all over her. The follow-up to 2019's *A Different Kind Of Human (Step 2)* has edgy, personal lyrics – during A Dangerous Thing, Aksnes sings, "when you are with me, you are cold and abusive" – but too often frames them within archetypal Nordic electro-dance-pop arrange-ments. Perhaps unsurprising, as among the names littering the production and co-writing credits are Sigrid producer Magnus Skylstad, Emma Bunton/Rag'n'Bone Man collaborator Jamie Hartman and Joy Crookes associate Glen Roberts. The most satisfying

Beach House

★★★★

Once Twice Melody

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Baltimore duo transcend dream-pop with 18 tracks of mesmerising digital psychedelia.

WHILE 2018'S 7 saw incoming producer Pete 'Sonic Boom' Kember draw Baltimore duo Beach House's hazy pop confections into tighter focus, follow-up *Once Twice Melody* marks a return to fuzz, but is no mere retread of past glories. Running 85 minutes and composed of 18 tracks, it's Beach House's grandest vision yet, favouring glacial, digital psychedelia as Giorgio Moroder may have imagined it. Electronic pocket symphonies like Pink Funeral, Hurts To Love and the graceful Through Me are scored by swirling synths and hypnotic arpeggios. Victoria Legrand croons with impassive beauty, like O Superman-era Laurie Anderson serenades, or as if someone programmed AI to sing like Judee Sill. These bewitching lullabies from the uncanny valley are often affecting – especially the cleansing hymnal of Sunset – though a little goes a long way, and *Once Twice Melody* delivers a lot.

Beach House: glacial, digital psychedelia in abundance.

David Belisle

Stevie Chick

On the right track: Black Country, New Road (with Isaac Wood, back row, left) take a substantial step forward.

Insect royalty

The kings and queens of new British post-rock take an exhilarating turn for the tuneful. By **Andrew Perry**.

Black Country, New Road

★★★★

Ants From Up There

NINJA TUNE. CD/DL/LP

ANYONE AS YET undecided about Black Country, New Road would have to concede that the Cambridgeshire post-rock/jazz explorers have triumphed in extraordinarily adverse circumstances.

To wit: their initial lifespan as Nervous Conditions was cut short by their original singer's online 'cancellation'. Then, once they'd embarked upon their 'new road' with guitarist Isaac Wood stepping up to the mike unplanned, their excellent debut *For The First Time* dropped in January 2021, depriving them of the missionary touring that ordinarily would have ensued.

This follow-up lands one year later: however hampered by 2021's restrictions, they've not stood idly by. BC,NR were among the first to live-stream a show online, and the audio of that memorable coming-of-age performance at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall is included in deluxe editions of *Ants From Up There*.

By June, they were gigging commendably widely, but instead of a victory lap, these sets were billed as improvised works-in-progress, effectively woodshedding Album #2. This writer witnessed one from inside a personalised Perspex container (and still got pinged!) – not overly enjoyable, but worth it in the long run, as *Ants…* represents a substantial step forward for them, with BC,NR's hitherto linear approach to composition evolving to embrace song structure, sung melody, even choruses.

After the one-minute Intro offers a crunching circular overture, Chaos Space Marine unexpectedly turns into piano-based, almost Noël Coward, supper-club songwriting, before erupting into a refrain right off Pulp's *Different Class*. While in the closing minute, Lewis Evans' sax, often a weapon of skronky austerity, leads a gracefully swaying, early-Roxy coda.

While *…First Time*'s lyrics often felt like postmodern textual collaging, Track X hinted that Wood wasn't shy of relatable emotion (think: his romantic declaration "in front of Black Midi"), or proper singing. Here, Concorde gives freer rein to those inclinations, via a beautifully constructed, singer-songwriterly study in melancholic longing, which builds to another disarming, cards-on-table confession ("I was made to love you, can't you tell?"), and a cathartic ensemble swell at the end.

If Wood warrants a gold star for his progress in the accidental frontman's mantle, BC,NR's evolution is equally about them collectively stepping back from their debut's uptight cramming in of ideas, and letting their music breathe – but all this, without giving up their questing edge.

Improv still looms large: the music for Haldern was apparently written in a group extemporisation at the titular German festival, while 12-minute finale Basketball Shoes serves up a characteristic linear narrative epic, starting out in Slint-y spaciousness, dramatically shifting tempo at 6:38, and climaxing amid near-operatic doom metal. "We're all working on ourselves," murmurs Wood somewhere in there, "and we're praying the rest don't mind how much we've changed." Fear not, we applaud it.

Rosie Foster

Basia Bulat

★★★

The Garden

SECRET CITY RECORDS. CD/DL/LP

Orchestral new leaf for Canadian folk-rocker.

Bulat has occasionally backed her passionate vocal with chamber ensembles, but here she reconsiders 16 tracks from her past which, she's come to see, mean something different to her now. Interpreted by classical arrangers, delivered with her band plus a string section, the songs blossom into unexpected new shapes. The title track suddenly has the pastoral lushness and wonder of, say, Cat Stevens' Morning Has Broken; and instead of a torn break-up song, a joyful violin makes it soaringly hopeful. Infamous treads the same path; it's a kiss-off to a cheat, but here – Bulat's vocal as gritty and wise as Natalie Merchant as she responds to a double bass – it becomes meditative, almost pitying. One or two numbers have too many twiddles; but then there's the waltz-like Are You In Love?, no longer a teen crush but adult, gently humorous and intoxicating.

Glyn Brown

Mitski

★★★★

Laurel Hell

DEAD OCEANS. CD/DL/LP

Back from hiatus, Mitski shares what she learned gazing into the abyss.

WITH THE high-impact drama of her 2018 breakthrough *Be The Cowboy*, New York singer/songwriter Mitsuki "Mitski" Laycock graduated from underground cult to mainstream-adjacent phenomenon. She didn't enjoy the experience, announcing a hiatus she's only now breaking with *Laurel Hell*. A more intimate, introspective set than *Be The Cowboy*, her sixth album is less about interpersonal relationships, tackling instead the tumult within Laycock herself. Translating this turmoil into soaring anthems, *Laurel Hell* perfects the overcast synth-pop Angel Olsen hinted at on *All Mirrors*, delivering an exercise in minor-key majesty, even when the tempo is upbeat (Should've Been Me, all Motown rhythms and piano flourishes from Dancing Queen, or the Scandi-pop throb of The Only Heartbreaker). Laycock's quest for escape yields some of her deepest moments, but her balance of mesmerising, confessional intensity with sculpted pop instincts remains an unfailing pleasure throughout.

Stevie Chick

Mitski: translating her inner turmoil.

Sea Change

★★★★

Mutual Dreaming

SHAPES RECORDINGS. DL

Norwegian's sublime third album, gene-splicing dream pop and club music.

In 2014, Ellen Sunde's debut single Let's Dance (not that one) suggested her idea of dancing was slowly swaying, feet rooted to the spot. Like Fever Ray, Sunde's most cited comparison point, Sea Change's electronic pop is more an intense, trance-inducing trip than sweaty exorcism, yet Sunde balances it with earthy, sensual tones. Like the best Scandi-pop, *Mutual Dreaming* runs both hot and cold. On That's Us, shadowy beats, spoken vocals and background groans resemble a rush of blood ("Let's go into to that place where I swallow you whole.") The penultimate title track increases the bpms until it's near full-on dancefloor, but *Mutual Dreaming* ends with the dark, disturbing ambience of Rituals, a firm reminder that Sea Change's music would rather play in the shadows than under the spotlight.

Martin Aston

Ebru Yildiz

Spoon

★★★★

Lucifer On The Sofa

MATADOR. CD/DL/LP

Texas indie stalwarts' tenth full-length plays smart and sings from the heart.

Britt Daniel calls Spoon's latest "classic rock as written by a guy who never did get Eric Clapton", a perfect summation of their magic. Literate and complex as any bespectacled Matador labelmate, Spoon also possess a classic rock nous that electrifies. Elvis Costello on the streets, ZZ Top between the sheets, this cocktail is keenest felt on My Babe, showcasing Daniel's gift for speaking plainly but with poetry, for toying with vintage forms while evading cliché. Ultimately, *Lucifer On The Sofa* puts nary a foot wrong, its rich songwriting enlivened by thrilling flourishes, from the thrums of noise that punctuate the switchblade swagger of The Hardest Cut, to the perfectly measured and affecting guitar heroics that elevate the slow-burning Satellite. With a voice that perfectly balances grit and sugar, Daniel and band tread their indie/rock tightrope with flair.

Stevie Chick

Telefís

★★★★

a hAon

DIMPLE DISCS. CD/DL/LP

Irish pair's weighty, irreverent dance-pop union.

Producer Jacknife Lee (U2, R.E.M., Kasabian) reckons *a hAon* – Irish Gaelic for Number One (likewise Telefís for Television) – "is easily the most enjoyable and rewarding music I've been involved with." Singer Cathal Coughlan (Microdisney, Fatima Mansions), meanwhile, cites Lee's "access to a wide range of skills I don't have" but also, the duo's shared "cultural/historical reference points". This mutual admiration society is borne out by an enthralling, entertaining union of skilful retro-electro and cuttingly cynical, mischievously surreal declarations amounting to "a corrosive nostalgia" for '70s Eire. A footstomping Stampede finds room for the River Styx, REO Speedwagon and Little Richard; one slice of Detroit techno homage is called Sex Bunting; their hookiest number is named Archbishop Beardmouth At The ChemOlympics. And, surely, We Need's resemblance to a Poundshop U2 is intentional, with Coughlan hollering "come on!" among lines like, "We need our talismans/Our ageless brands."

Martin Aston

Years & Years

★★

Night Call

POLYDOR. CD/DL/LP

First album without co-founders Emre Türkmen and Mikey Goldsworthy.

Olly Alexander, the It's A Sin star, Celebrity Gogglebox favourite and rumoured new Dr Who, is essentially now a sole trader under the Years & Years banner. The resulting long-player is a watertight collection of pop bangers tailor-made for drivetime radio. Despite lyrics seemingly written on the back of a cigarette packet between filming commitments, this is an album of ambitious king-making. But in its Thatcher-ite commitment to pop perfection, it turns the art of the album into a sausage factory of hit-making. Alexander's Years & Years sounds like a ragbag of contemporary influences (Clean Bandit, Dua Lipa, The Weeknd) rather than possessing a distinct sound of its own – the nation may be hard pressed to identify its pop sheen over the mechanical hum when it plays in Tesco Metros across the land. Ironically, *Night Call* could have done with some group frisson to create more jagged musical edges.

Priya Elan

The Delines

★★★★

The Sea Drift

DECOR. CD/DL/LP

Soulful Portland, Oregon outfit bring more tales of the marginalised.

Set on the US's Gulf Coast, *The Sea Drift* has been honed to a fine shine lyrically and musically, with guitarist and feature-film-adapted novelist Willy Vlautin sketching the ultra-vivid character studies that Amy Boone inhabits on this third album. She animates them with time-worn empathy; hence we feel for the woman in drifting break-up song All Along The Ride ("I've been trying my whole life/To get a thicker skin"), and for the unflustered heroine of Kid Codeine, so-named by her boxer boyfriend. The laidback grooves are impeccable, with soul bassist Freddy Trujillo and jazz drummer Sean Oldham the seasoned backbone of the self-explanatory, melting brass-imbued Drowning In Plain Sight. Elsewhere, two noir-ish instrumentals – Lynette's Lament and The Gulf Drift Lament – seem to soundtrack these characters' likely insomnia. Wonderfully immersive stuff.

James McNair

Funky three: Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio serve up the feel-good vibes.

Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio

★★★

Cold As Weiss

COLEMINE. CD/DL/LP

Soul-jazz group's cool, retro-flavoured grooves.

BACK IN THE late '50s and early '60s, organ trios were the hippest combos in jazz, led by Hammond heroes such as Jimmy Smith and Big John Patton. Taking their stylistic cue from those pioneers, this Seattle-based trio combine cool Blue Note-influenced sounds with funk elements that reverberate with echoes of The Meters, The JB's (minus the horns) and Booker T. & The M.G.'s. The band's new drummer Daniel Weiss is the inspiration for this third LP, where his snare drum's crisp crackle locks in with Jimmy James's scratchy guitar filigrees and Lamarr's booming organ bass. From the funky Pull Up Your Pants to the slow-grinding Big TT's Blues and more upbeat Get Da Steppin', the DLO3 serve up a decidedly old school-sounding platter whose feel-good vibe is infectious.

Charles Waring

Josephine Foster

★★★★

Godmother

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

The ceaseless individualist enfolds synths into her world to striking effect.

By track three, Guardian Angel, it's clear that Josephine Foster's particular musical garden has welcomed new blossoms. Her crepuscular delivery and cracked, often ghostly voice is intact, as is the inherent sense that her songs channel the spirit of an ancient woodland. There's a new directness, a more linear approach to melody, and, most unexpectedly, the overt presence of synthesizers. They weave through the songs as gauzy texture or, by turn, are in subtle, plangent attendance. For touchstones, the favoured settings are akin to Kraftwerk's Ruckzuck and the early John Carpenter soundtracks. Factor this into the mantra-like Flask Of Wine and the vocal round core to Dali Rama, and the result comes across as an Appalachian folk-based nod to Alice Coltrane's spiritual recordings with synths. It ends with the beautiful, openly devotional The Sum Of Us All.

Kieron Tyler

Francis A Willey

Pan•American

★★★★

The Patience Fader

KRANKY. CD/DL/LP

Erstwhile Labradford mainstay's elegiac eighth Pan•American long-player.

Mark Nelson's music has always cast a dream-like spell, a minimal instrumental arsenal deployed to paint effulgent, immersive landscapes. As Pan•American, he has spent over two decades intermittently revisiting a locus where the infinite spatial halo of dub meets spare, ineffably American guitar lines, a permutation that speaks softly of huge things – great piney, Western skies, deep emotional wreckage… *The Patience Fader* finds Nelson in something close to solo guitar mode; his signature etiolated twang occasionally augmented by splashes of lap steel, harmonica and distant, twinkling electronics. The album's 12 intimate essays, described as "elegies as much as songs", feel like ghostly, poignant testaments to our troubled times, and whether it's the pretty, Tom Verlaine-like meanderings of Outskirts, Dreamlit, North Line's beauteous cosmic country swoops, or the ambient Western soundtrack drift of Grounded, an elegiac aura of sadness haunts proceedings.

David Sheppard

Modern Studies

★★★★

We Are There

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

Fourth studio album from Glasgow quartet.

Emily Scott's voice is a beautiful thing. It flies like Sandy Denny, but it has the wounded intimacy of Beth Gibbons and the precision of Christine McVie too. It's the calling card of Modern Studies (named after a subject on the Scottish school curriculum). If Scott desired, she could be a pure folk artist, but she and her three multi-instrumentalists have more vaulting ambitions, so they're part British folk rock, part Laurel Canyon lushness, part richly layered ambient indie. The closing Winter Springs leads with piano and Scott's pure vocals, before gently escalating to male voice choir backing, spooky Theremin-style whoops, miscellaneous clattering and strings, all without breaking its funereal pace. Elsewhere, there's delicacy in the haunting Comfort Me, and Light A Fire gallops along with Moonlight Shadow-style breeziness, while the instrumental coda to Do You Wanna is a spiralling joy.

John Aizlewood

The Reds, Pinks & Purples

★★★★

Summer At Land's End

TOUGH LOVE. CD/DL/LP

San Franciscan's latest "depresso-pop" epistle.

Having adopted at least 15 aliases (including collaborations), Glenn Donaldson appears to have settled: *Summer At Land's End* is his fourth solo Reds, Pinks & Purples album in three years. Prolific, yes, but also obsessive, as like an indie-pop Mark Rothko, Donaldson keeps refining what is essentially one song: breezily mid-tempo, droning (occasionally jangling) guitars and vocals, melodies and lyrics that bear heavy traces of The Smiths, and, to a lesser extent, Felt. Ironically, Reds, Pinks & Purples records are a forever autumn of muted yellows and browns; even the optimistically-named Pour The Light In masks desperation ("Without love, the rest is sorrow… the grave's a veil over paradise/I've laid too long in"). Fortunately, Donaldson's undeniable homage is exquisitely on the nose, one comforting swoon after another. There are days, now and for ever, when only songs like Let's Pretend We're Not In Love will do.

Martin Aston

North Mississippi Allstars

★★★

Set Sail

NEW WEST. CD/DL/LP

Jam band soul from Southern rock scions.

Even by American jam band standards, North Mississippi Allstars like to kick back and just let the music take them. The core of the group – Luther and Cody Dickinson, the sons of venerated producer Jim – have now made 13 albums, and none has been so wreathed in bong smoke as *Set Sail*. Apart from the upbeat soul of Never Want To Be Kissed, featuring Stax veteran William Bell on vocals, *Set Sail* stumbles and squints through its nine other tracks, although on Bumpin' they at least rouse themselves long enough to sound like Tony Joe White imitating Sly Stone. But when they hit their sweet spot on Outside, with Lamar Williams Jr (son of Allman Brothers' bassist Lamar Williams Sr) on vocals, North Mississippi Allstars capture the lightning in a bottle groove that marks out all the very best Southern soul.

Andy Fyfe

Beth Hart

★★★

A Tribute To Led Zeppelin

PROVOGUE. CD/DL/LP

Blues rock star's enjoyable romp through Led Zep's back pages.

Sounding like her vocal cords are marinated in nicotine and whisky, Beth Hart wields her voice like an earth-scorching flamethrower. Though her solo albums have shown she can sing with a nuanced sensitivity that can melt hearts, on this Zeppelin covers album she mostly adopts a combative, take-no-prisoners attitude. It's a supremely risky move tackling iconic songs by one of rock's most admired bands, but Hart shows no trepidation, finding the right balance between gusto and good taste. She rampages her way through nine classic Zep songs, injecting a febrile energy into Black Dog, Whole Lotta Love – which boasts a much trippier middle section than the original – and *Houses Of The Holy's* funk-rocking The Crunge, where she hollers like the love child of Robert Plant and James Brown.

Charles Waring

Animal Collective

★★★★

Time Skiffs

DOMINO. CD/DL/LP

Baltimore experimentalists' first album in six years is a loose, wild treat.

Following the rigid, digital compositions of 2016's *Painting With*, Animal Collective's eleventh LP is an altogether more natural affair. This time their anarchic, playful side takes charge, avant-garde impulses working in service of songs that still play profoundly with structure but are, perhaps unexpectedly, coherent and melodically focused. The audacity is impressive: the various elements of Prester John orbiting its central heavy bass riff like satellites, Passer-by's spacey folksong materialising from the ether via abstract chimes, synths and gongs, and the endearingly Beach Boys-ish Strung With Everything a gambolling, giddy mess held together by harmonies and abundant glee. This infectious exuberance might blind you to the craft at play here, but while *Time Skiffs* sounds deeply, existentially scattered, every atom is in its rightful place.

Stevie Chick

Burnt Sugar The Arkestra Chamber

★★★★

Angels Over Oakanda

AVANTGROIDD. CD/DL

First album in four years from the New York Afro-futurist big band.

This thrilling return to record has sadly turned into memorial with the sudden passing of Greg Tate, the acclaimed critic and Burnt Sugar's conductor-composer, last month. In its first decade, the improvising avant-funk collective – launched by Tate, a co-founder of the Black Rock Coalition, in 1999 – fired records of constant, tectonic surprise with Sun Ra-on-Saturn frequency and a kaleidoscope of P-Funk-scale line-ups. *Angels Over Oakanda* is a comparatively terse eruption: an 18-minute title ride of electric-Miles soloing argument over the salsa-Coltrane spell of Santana's *Caravanserai*; then an LP side's worth of remixed variations. But the effect is a sustained psychedelic-fairground high with gripping undertow (the slippery loops and bass-hook jitters in Repatriation-Of-The-Midnight-Moors) and a striking climax in Lisala-Over-Inna-Oakanda, galactic hip-hop with soaring vocal fireworks by Lisala Beatty that now sound like sweet farewell to a great writer and departed leader.

David Fricke

Forenzics

★★★★

Shades And Echoes

WARNER MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

Former Split Enz men re-imagine snippets of earliest back catalogue.

New Zealand's Split Enz disbanded in 1984, but numerous reunions, classical collaborations and re-imaginings have always pulled former members – Neil and Tim Finn among them – back into its orbit. Nothing, however, has been as musically ambitious as *Forenzics*, Tim and Enz keyboard player Eddie Rayner's deep delve into the band's earliest days. Taking what the pair refer to as "shades" from tracks such as Walking Down A Road and Matinee Idyll (129) from their 1976, Phil Manzanera-produced LP *Second Thoughts*, and the later, should-have-been-a-hit Give It A Whirl, Finn and Rayner rebuild entirely new songs, alongside seven actual entirely new songs. Sometimes it resembles The Flaming Lips, sometimes it peels off into the outer reaches of Brian Eno solo albums, and sometimes it just sounds wondrously eccentric. For Tim fans, this is his best non-Neil-related work since his '80s solo albums.

Andy Fyfe

Hisham Bharoocha

Mothermary

★★★★

I Am Your God

ITALIANS DO IT BETTER. CD/DL/LP

Mormon-raised siblings with divinely profane synth-pop.

Mothermary's origin story is a cathartic tale of personal trauma alchemised into pop triumph. The youngest of nearly a dozen children, Larena and Elyse Winn were subjected to the patriarchal scriptures of Mormonism from girlhood, brainwashed into believing themselves to be second-class citizens. Elyse escaped their native Montana first, fleeing to New York and schooling herself in electronic production. Twin sister Larena followed, the pair exploring their aesthetic via "sacrilegious ritual" live shows and provocatively blood-soaked videos, while crafting an artful, sonically poised debut. *I Am Your God* is stacked with neon noir earworms that coolly denounce churchy hypocrisy (Catch Fire) and exult in self-affirming sexuality (Coming For You). They also pay tribute to spiritual ancestor Madonna with a serene take on Like A Prayer, the Sistine Chapel of blasphemous dancefloor bangers rendered as a blissed-out ode to newly found freedom.

Manish Agarwal

Trentemøller

★★★★

Memoria

IN MY ROOM. CD/DL/LP

Noise and tranquillity, modular synths and jangle from Danish composer.

A narcotic, shoegazey fug has long lingered over Anders Trentemøller's work, but it seems to now envelop the Danish electronic composer's output. Slowdive's Rachel Goswell is absent this time – she appeared on 2019's *Obverse* – but Trentemøller's sixth LP luxuriates in a sheen of glitterball guitar, saturnine electro rock and chugging motorik redolent of Berkshire's sound explorers. A Summer's Empty Room wraps Twin Peaks-theme vibes in skirls of otherworldly voices and modular synths. Glow's opening bars recall the sad cowboy guitars of Slowdive's Rutti, before ascending into a soundclash of deep beats and unsettling interference. Throughout, the gossamer-light vocals of Lisbet Fritze are a calming presence, especially All Too Soon's mid-'90s college rock feel. In the hands of less talented producers, *Memoria* could have skirted pastiche. Instead, Trentemøller's deftness in balancing light and shade and a multi-layered approach are key to its allure.

Stephen Worthy

ELECTRONIC

BY STEPHEN WORTHY

GAS

★★★★

Der Lange Marsch

KOMPAKT. CD/DL/LP

Cologne's ambient techno trailblazer marches on with purpose.

Wolfgang Voigt's third GAS album in four years after a 17-year absence finds the German producer, now into his seventh decade, setting a rigid, military tempo from the get-go – less 4/4, rather the 2/4 march time of the album title. Those cornerstones of GAS albums past – irresistible ambient loops and a drone deluge, manipulated samples and the occasional such fripperies as song titles – remain intact. But while opener Der Lange Marsch 1 sways like marram grass in the breeze, there's a relentlessness to the album's overall progress. Is Voigt, whose interest in Romanticism particularly manifests itself in a love of nature, marking Earth's admission into intensive care? The chief source of Der Lange Marsch 4's emotional heft is its tethering to the tumultuous, tragic crescendo of Leibestod, from Tristan And Isolde, for example. Entirely appropriate for a record that's Wagnerian in scale, tone and subject.

ALSO RELEASED

Charbonneau/Amato

★★★

Synth Works Vol. 2

BACKWARD MUSIC. DL/LP

Armed with a toolbox of modular loops, gentle motorik jams and sweet melodies, Canadian multi-instrumentalists Mathieu Charbonneau and Pietro Amato make lush, contemplative electronic vignettes. Recorded at the end of the Montréal winter, its mood, appropriately, meanders between chilled ambience and grooves that slowly burst open and blossom.

The Furniture

★★★

The Furniture

SPANISH PRAYERS. CD/DL/LP

Released on Cigarettes After Sex's Spanish Prayers label, Michael Kuhl and Matthew Pierce's debut descends into an intoxicating world of dark psych, narcotic drone and heavy electronic moods as The Furniture. With Kuhl's pillowy, jazz-trained drums to the fore, it was recorded in one take in a basement club in their Baltimore hometown, the sense of intimacy ramped up to heady levels.

Fort Romeau

★★★★

Beings Of Light

GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL. DL/LP

Michael Greene, as Fort Romeau, makes house music with a light touch. Formerly a member of La Roux's touring band and now a sought-after DJ, on *Beings Of Light* he flips between minimal workouts and spacey disco, radiant summery jams and even into tender, crepuscular ambient. Fit for sofa listening as much as it is for the dancefloor.

Villager

★★★★

Frontier

MCMXCV. DL/LP

Contemplative, psychedelic trips into the Maryland countryside and a journey up to Maine to spend time with grandparents helped inform Alex Young's work on *Frontier*. Pillowy trip-hop beats, womb-like, Gold Panda-style lo-fi electronica and skittering quasi-house strongly suggest that the experience was a restorative one. *SW*

Los Bitchos

★★★★

Let The Festivities Begin!

CITY SLANG. CD/DL/LP

London's answer to Khruangbin (on mescaline), produced by Alex Kapranos.

From the comedy name, one might imagine some routine *Nuggets*-y bashers born out of the lively Spanish garage-punk scene. Instead: here's Britain's coolest new instrumental party band, with pan-global rhythms reflecting the combo's multicultural background, and lashings of surf guitar often curiously delivering a Middle Eastern melodic feel. Come Quentin Tarantino's remake of Lawrence Of Arabia, anything off Los Bitchos's irresistible debut could soundtrack the camel chase. The Link Is About To Die opens with fabulous energy, its seductive exotica swing fuelled by galloping percussion, rustling maracas and a tune-sodden twang, all serving up dancefloor gold. Baghdad rave-up I Enjoy It even arrives overlaid with excitable bar chatter. Pista (Fresh Start) sashays like Jonathan Richman's Egyptian Reggae as covered on a *Habibi Funk* compilation, while Tropico recalls Sly & Robbie's Revolutionaries scouring beyond Jamaica for sublime outernational groove. With zingy production from Franz Ferdinand's Alex Kapranos, *Let The Festivities Begin!* is, indeed, a proper fire-starter.

Andrew Perry

Andrew Scott Young/Ryan Jewell/Ryley Walker

★★★

Post Wook

HUSKY PANTS. CD/DL

Playful avant-guitar hero kicks out the hippy jams.

Ryley Walker spends an inordinate amount of time satirising his own creative vision – hence this low-key launch of a new genre, *Post Wook*. "Wook", for those perhaps mercifully unaware of the term, is a name given to skankier hippies on the American jam band scene; a culture theoretically run through post-rock filters here by Walker and his regular rhythm section. It's an arch concept, for sure, but these seven instrumentals make a neat coda to last year's *Course In Fable* set, with the emphasis on pastoral post-rock far more than core wook fare like Phish. And while roughly half the album tends towards tetchy, frictional improv, Pegasus, Childers and Allegro are instantly gorgeous, leaning into a jazz-folk sound that, thanks to Andrew Scott Young's Pastorius-style fretless bass, recalls the spacious wonders of *Hejira*.

John Mulvey

Bas Jan

★★★★

Baby U Know

LOST MAP. CD/DL/LP

Second album of high-strung art-pop virtuosity from London quartet.

"Concentrate!" snaps Serafina Steer on Profile Picture, *Baby U Know*'s closing track, "Why can't you concentrate?" Bas Jan – harpist, solo artist and Jarvis Cocker associate Steer, violinist Emma Smith, drummer Rachel Horwood and electric violinist Charlie Stock – aren't ones for buckling down. Their songs vibrate with skittish energy, Raincoats-style violin, stripped-willow vocals and nervy electronics dipping and weaving through tricky states of mind. There are fretful internal monologues (Profile Picture) and workings-out of philosophical positions (Progressive Causes); All Forgotten's political despair ricochets against the myth-making of "My Incantations, Herbs And Art Have Abandoned Me". The emotional pull of Have Bewitched Me, meanwhile, gives way to Too Good To Be True's wild disillusionment, clawed up by an almost comically ugly sub-Fall keyboard. Full of emotional U-turns, musical detours and conversational leaps, *Baby U Know* demands and deserves undivided attention.

Victoria Segal

Grace Petrie

★★★★

Connectivity

THE ROBOT HOME NEEDS HOME COLLECTIVE. CD/DL/LP

Heart on sleeve beats ever more solidly.

So conditioned is she to being constantly on the move and shooting from the hip, you imagine the last year must have been especially night-marish for Grace Petrie. This resultant LP, however, suggests otherwise – songs of hope and gentle reflection are couched in full arrangements without sacrificing any of the caustic lyricism which made us sit up in the first place. Opener Storm To Weather offers a rousingly upbeat take on recent events but, despite the additional sophistication, it's still Petrie baring her soul and vulnerability – with character-istic wryness – on outstanding tracks like We've Got An Office In Hackney, IKEA, and Some Days Are Worse Than Others, where she reflects upon her younger idealism. The fire in her belly still burns brightly on the catchy The Losing Side, but no longer does her sound like a Billy Bragg wannabe.

Colin Irwin

Paul Draper

★★★

Cult Leader Tactics

KSCOPE. CD/DL/LP

Former Mansun leader's second solo album; a satire on self-help manuals.

Fascinated by 21st-century mini-Machiavellis, Paul Draper wrote a fictitious self-help parody, called it *Cult Leader Tactics* and used extracts from it as lyrics to the LP of the same name. Wittily cynical, he tackles the music industry on the title track ("climb the greasy ladder… monetise these classics"), career ruthlessness on Dirty Trix ("be a moral-free zone") and the lockdown on Omega Man, his collaboration with Steven Wilson. Strings drench the airy instrumental interlude Cult Leader Tricks In E-Flat Minor, and a 266-strong fan choir graces the standout Lyin' 'Bout Who U Sleep With. Elsewhere, though, for all the adventurousness of the project, he's musically quite conservative, often evoking Tears For Fears and, on Everybody Becomes A Problem Eventually, Duran Duran. Still, as guides to being an awful person go, he's hit the mark.

John Aizlewood

Pixies

★★★★

Live In Brixton

DEMON. CD/DL/LP

Their four full-blooded Academy comeback shows from June 2004, in full.

When Pixies took the stage on the opening Tuesday of their Euro-exclusive Brixton run, the quartet initially walked out front and milked a minute-long ovation, which visibly blew them backwards in its vehemence. The June 2 double-album here launches straight into Frank Black and Kim Deal's honeyed opening reading of Neil Young's Winterlong, but the ferocity of both their playing and the audience response is palpable through the whole show, from Nimrod's Son's gleeful "son of a motherfucker" shoutalong to a thrilling, throat-shredding Debaser. It felt like a definitive, unbeatable set, but each night the songs varied substantially, including Wednesday's terrifying Something Against You and Thursday's monstrous Planet Of Sound. At that point, the rock reunion had few worthwhile precedents, but at a stroke these Pixies gigs – cool, unsentimental, spiritually correct – made it OK, directly influencing acts by The Specials and My Bloody Valentine. These electrifying recordings, indeed, obliterate every counter-argument.

Andrew Perry

Jeff Parker

★★★★★

Forfolks

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM. CD/DL/LP

LA-based Tortoise guitarist spins filigree patterns of folk-jazz mystery.

Jeff Parker: creating entirely new sonic worlds.

A linchpin member of Tortoise and Isotope 217, Jeff Parker defined Chicago's '90s post-rock sound as much as John McEntire, Bundy K. Brown or David Grubbs, his intricate, loop-driven minimalism occupying a bright new colour within the Venn diagram of jazz, folk, blues, funk and drone harmonics. On this, the follow-up to 2020's rich and multi-layered *Suite For Max Brown*, he is alone with just his guitar and effects and the results are mesmerising. Much like the late free improv guitarist Derek Bailey, Parker can unpick a standard with meticulous style, taking a classic like My Ideal and revealing its grand inner workings. Yet while his cover of Thelonious Monk's Ugly Beauty reveals a kinship with a fellow master of unadorned melodicism, it's on hypnotic original compositions such as Excess Success or reworked pieces like La Jetée that Parker's true genius shines through, an ability to create entire new sonic worlds from the tiniest of elements. There's nothing there, and then suddenly there is everything.

Andrew Male

Lee Anne Schmitt

Angèle David-Guillou

★★★★

A Question Of Angles

VILLAGE GREEN. CD/DL/LP

French composer has bold change of tune on third LP.

Angèle David-Guillou's preceding *Mouvements* trilogy ended with the ex-Klima driving force playing pipe organ live at the Union Chapel. *A Question Of Angles* is less austere. Opener Valley Of Detachment plunges the listener into bright, neo-classical territory, its fast-pulsing, metronomic sax recalling Michael Nyman's '80s film scores for Peter Greenaway. A similar sleight of hand is at work amid the shifting time signatures of the solo cello Akrotiri, sawing violins and bass trombones of Quid Pro Quo, and the title track's pelting, Theremin-driven melancholia – efforts that show their debt to Giovanni Fusco's dark atmospherics, Philip Glass's orchestral push and pull and Steve Reich's phase-shifting in plain sight. Yet David-Guillou's repetitious efforts play tricks on the ear: indelible melodies emerge from the choreographed minimalism without wasting a single note.

Andy Cowan

Big Big Train

★★★

Welcome To The Planet

ENGLISH ELECTRIC. CD/DL/LP

Their last LP to feature frontman David Longdon, who died in November.

Founder member Gregory Spawton's motivation for releasing this album only six months after the last turned out to be horribly prescient. He felt life was speeding up and that time seemed short. While Longdon sings as powerfully as ever, he and Spawton do less of the song-writing than usual, with credits spread out among the band, including new members Carly Bryant and Dave Foster. Strongly melodic tunes feature lots of bright vocal harmonies and fewer proggy instrumental diversions – the sound is often closer to Crowded House than, say, King Crimson, and BBT's signature history tales are for once absent. Lots of good moments though – Made From Sunshine and Proper Jack Froster especially. The only misfire is, oddly, the quirky title track (and how inapt that title seems now), which starts promisingly before veering into whimsy.

John Bungey

Weeed

★★★★

Do You Fall?

HALFSHELL. CD/DL/LP

Seventh album from Portland's "bio-cosmic rock'n'roll" quintet.

Since 2014 debut *Feng Shui Capital Of The World*, Weeed's Black Sabbath-derived stoner rock has ventured further out and in, embracing Eastern tunings, ambient quietude, jam-band action, psych and Krautrock, but *Do You Fall?* is a notable leap forward. Founder member Gabriel Seaver has talked of losing friends within their close-bound community, and of the role of music as medicine for emotional transformation; in a musical sense, they've replaced bass guitar with a second lead guitar, citing Tuareg and Popol Vuh as influences. The result is joyous and cathartic, from brief, delicate instrumental Ontological Register to the ragged levitation of Sun Song and two 11-minutes-plus epics, Rhythm On The Ground 1-4 and Reflection, which (stoner rock origins aside) serve as prog-style ebbing, flowing summaries of Weeed's journey to this exultant point.

Martin Aston

A night on the tiles: Angèle David-Guillou's indelible melodies emerge.

Dave Stapleton

Diasonics

★★★

Origin Of Forms

RECORD KICKS. CD/DL/LP

Russian Federation instro combo embraces the groove.

Pictured on the back of their debut album, members of Moscow's Diasonics variously sport a flat cap, a fishing hat, branded trainers and a chin-skimming beard lacking the moustache part. No T-shirts. Such stylistic signifiers imply a similarly precise approach to their music. And so it is. *Origin Of Forms* is a mostly instrumental mission statement placing them in the centre of a Venn diagram where '70s soundtrack grooves intersect with library music jazz and what seems like a Turkish approach to melody. It gels most effectively on the mysterious-sounding Ink, the twinkling Affair and the spaghetti Western-ish Origin. Diasonics' profile is low within the Russian Federation, so *Origin Of Forms* is out on a sympathetic Italian label. Had they surfaced in the '90s, Acid Jazz would've snapped them up.

Kieron Tyler

Kendra Morris

★★★★

Nine Lives

KARMA CHIEF. CD/DL/LP

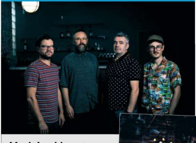
Beautifully sung, soulful fourth LP from NY vocalist.

Kendra Morris's first album in five years finds her in economical, soulful mood. Written to embrace various moments in her "nine life-times" to date, and working with long-term producer Jeremy Page, *Nine Lives* feels more natural than her previous work. This Life is a super-sweet summation of the New York-based singer's career to date; modern and retro enough in appropriate measure, its Philly string flourishes support Morris's expressive voice. *Nine Lives* is at its best when the adornments – as good as they are – fall away, and it simply showcases Morris; the end of Who We Are or Penny Pincher, a softly acoustic mêlée of vocals, guitar and piano. Aside from Got Me Down, which strays a little into vintage-soul-by-numbers, it's the consistency of *Nine Lives* that makes it a rewarding listen – especially on the two closing songs, Circle Eights and Drag On.

Daryl Easlea

JAZZ

BY ANDY COWAN



Mark Lockheart

★★★★

Dreamers

EDITION. CD/DL/LP

Quartet set from under-sung saxophonist, an exemplar in the art of mood building.

After working with a 30-piece orchestra for 2019's *Days On Earth*, *Dreamers* marks a partial return to Lockheart's eccentric roots in Loose Tubes and Polar Bear. A jagged, otherworldly feel percolates through this four-way with Dinosaur keyboardist Elliott Galvin, long-term bassist Tom Herbert and drummer Dave Smith – relatively gentle as it weaves around Lockheart's raga-like two-bar sax riff on Jagdish before careering off the rails on Gangster Rat and Mingle Tingle, with Galvin wreaking havoc from his Frankensteined box of tricks. The Kraftwerk-inspired title track and longing tour-de-force Weird Weather better display Lockheart's contrasting spare and feathery tones, shades of Wayne Shorter and Michael Brecker brushing up against spaced-out counter-melodies. The ever-shifting rhythmic pulse further blurs the lines between composition and improvisation, ensuring the woozy momentum never wavers.

ALSO RELEASED

Joel Lyssarides

★★★★

Stay Now

ACT. CD/DL/LP

Recorded at night, in the dark, the intimate third LP from rising Swedish pianist Lyssarides (better known as sideman for Nils Landgren, Viktoria Tolstoy and Anne Sofie Von Otter) promises a bright future. Whispers of Monk, Svensson and Jarrett creep through the rippling refrains and shifting minor-key ruminations, his subtle dynamic interplay with bassist Niklas Fernqvist and drummer Rasmus Blixt enhancing these reflective songs' hazy shades of winter.

Tara Minton & Ed Babar

★★★★

Two For The Road

JAZZIZIT. CD/DL

To consolidate the momentum of 2020's *Please Do Not Ignore The Mermaid*, the Australian harpist and UK double bassist dip into modern British jazz and American songbooks. Whether sensitively rewiring Norma Winstone's Dream Of The Elders or digging into the reflective edges of Monk's Round Midnight, their impressionistic takes enhance the originals, with Minton's ethereal voice and free-spirited sprints offset by Babar's grounding low-end.

Black Flower

★★★★

Magma

SDBAN ULTRA. DL/LP

The fifth outing from the Brussels quintet spearheaded by saxophonist and flutist Nathan Daems doubles down on their serpentine mélange of Ethio jazz, Afrobeat and psychedelia. While the propulsive rhythms of The Forge and Deep Dive Down consolidate known strengths, the title track's arpeggiated unease (courtesy of new keyboardist Karel Cuelenaere) and old folk flavour of Morning In The Jungle (voiced by Meskerem Mees) trace new ground.

Ethan Iverson

★★★★

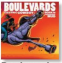
Every Note Is True

BLUE NOTE. CD/DL/LP

Unlike recent dalliances with American standards and Bud Powell, there's a straight-ahead focus on memorable tunes on the ex-Bad Plus pianist's first for Blue Note, Iverson often playing within himself on a three-way with Larry Grenadier and Jack DeJohnette. A shadowy rendition of DeJohnette oldie Blue and the unexpected solo twists of Had I But Known reassert his mastery of dissonance and drama. *AC*

Blood Red Shoes
★★★
Ghosts On Tape
VELVETEEN. DL/LP

The current zeitgeist for '80s goth rock (see QOTSA, Fontaines D.C., etc) falls in step with Laura-Mary Carter and Steven Ansell's sound: inky black, sharp-edged pop. Their sixth LP is an accomplished study in post-punk boom, synth whoosh and creepy-crawl vocals. *JB*



Boulevards
★★★★
Electric Cowboy: Born In The Carolina Mud
NEW WEST. CD/DL/LP

Jamil Rashad's fourth corrals left-field all-stars (from Black Pumas, Twin Peaks and Durand Jones' Indications) to slay demons over modern country-funk jams packed with slick guitar licks, springy basslines and endless hooks. *AC*

Rob Burger
★★★★
Marching With Feathers
WESTERN VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Ex-Tin Hat Trio jazzer Burger's dreamy piano ruminations tug at the emotions on pensive piano solos Figurine and Still, while the ghostly tango of the title track cuts even deeper. A plangent set where restraint and purity hold sway. *AC*

Cassels
★★★
A Gut Feeling
GOD UNKNOWN. CD/DL/LP

There's needle-sharp precision to London brothers Jim and Loz Beck's third. Unlike their more personal LPs, the push-and-pull directness of their stripped-back guitar/drums attack and heavy breakdowns are offset by biting, third-person narratives, beset with anxiety and political discontent. *AC*

The Districts
★★★
Great American Painting
FAT POSSUM. CD/DL/LP

Witnessing street protests in Philadelphia and unspoilt wilderness in Washington state inspired singer/guitarist Rob Grote to write about contrasting extremes on emotionally literate, indie rock evocations (see White Devil's protest yelp; the Shins-y Hover). *JB*

Group Listening
★★★★
Clarinet & Piano: Selected Works, Vol. 2
PRAH RECORDINGS. DL/LP

Clarinettist Stephen Black and pianist Paul Jones's second LP of covers. Suffused with subtle electronics, they re-imagine Neul's Seeland as an exercise in aural hypnosis, while their take on the Camberwick Green TV theme is pure nostalgia. *SW*

Dieter Ilg
★★★★
Dedication
ACT. CD/DL

German jazz musician lets his double bass do the talking on intimate, improvised runs that nod to Bach (Rochade), Mingus (Diversity) and avant-garde giant Peter Kowald (Wupp). Sparing use of echo and extended techniques ensure perpetual motion. *AC*

King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard
★★★
Butterfly 3001
KGLW. DL/LP

Remixing the synthetic highs of *Butterfly 3000* include DJ Shadow (Black Hot Soup), Confidence Man (Interior People) and Flaming Lips' superior reduction of Ya Love. *JB*

Marc O
★★★★
L'Homme De L'Ombre
PLASTIC SOUNDS. CD/DL

Jilly Cooper/Bowie/Iggy-evoking Les Démodés (Old Fashioned) sets the tone for Marc Olivier's French-sung solo debut, which features former Manfreds and Serge Gainsbourg bassist Dave Richmond on 10 well realised, vintage aesthetic fantasies. *JB*

Monoscopes
★★★★
Painkillers And Wine
BIG BLACK CAR. CD/DL/LP

In a meta take on the album's title, Paolo Mioni (ex-Jennifer Gentle) and band do a lovely, slowed down version of Loop-Spacemen 3's high intensity, insistent repetition. Guitar/tambourine/organ and top grooves in support of his lovely Cohen/Lou Reed-ish vocal. *JB*

EXTENDED PLAY

Shadow play: Fleet Foxes' Robin Pecknold in winter hymnal mood.

Fleet Foxes
A Very Lonely Solstice
(YOUTUBE/STREAMING SERVICES)

"I'm not the season I'm in" sings Robin Pecknold towards the end of this solo acoustic set, recorded in December 2020 in a Brooklyn church and livestreamed to those stuck at home. While Pecknold excels at such archaic, elemental wisdom, the seasons seem, conversely, critical to his deeply grounded folk aesthetic. The same month this set was recorded, Fleet Foxes released a career-high LP, *Shore*, exactly on the autumnal equinox. For karmic balance, then, film of this show and its accompanying soundtrack manifest digitally on the winter solstice; the day of the longest shadows making a perfect backdrop to Pecknold's shy virtuosity.

Anyone who saw Robin roar into the rafters during his off-mike, solo acoustic spots at early Fleet Foxes shows, will remember how well Tiger Mountain Peasant Song, from their 2008 debut, works in this setting. More school assembly than churchy, it still sounds utterly beguiling. His cover of Barry Gibb's In The Morning is super-Dylan in its phrasing and intonation; while Blue Spotted Tail, the gorgeous, arpeggiated lullaby from 2011's *Helplessness Blues*, is another spot-lit moment. Don't wait until the longest day to watch or listen to it.

Roedelius & Story
★★★
4 Hands
ERASED TAPES. CD/DL/LP

The '4 hands' of Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Tim Story, recorded on the same piano, across minimal, featherlight studies from the kosmische great – now 87 – and Grammy-winning composer. Seeweed, with its use of prepared piano, is a highlight. *SW*

Maya Shenfeld
★★★★
In Free Fall
THRILL JOCKEY. CD/DL/LP

Young, Berlin-trained composer Shenfeld previously played guitar in punk bands, two musical strands that meet in her shimmering debut. Choral and orchestral music with digital effects; gently distorted on Silver; gleefully New Age on Body, Electric. *JB*

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Dwellers on the threshold

Two albums (and one mini album) that capture Birmingham's much-missed magi of occult psych-pop at their experimental and emotional extremes. **Andrew Male** is bewitched.

Broadcast Reissues

WARP. CD/DL/LP

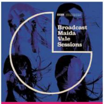
BROADCAST NEVER belonged to the present. From such early recordings as the ghostly waltzing lullaby of 1996's Accidentals or The Book Lovers' cimbalom spy-theme drama, it was clear Trish Keenan and James Cargill's spectral pop sound existed beyond their urban Birmingham origins, somewhere between half-remembered folk and psych pasts and an unrealised incorporeal future. As such, their music – eerie, elegiac, yet imbued with a working-class science-lab optimism – has aged in a very different way from their late-'90s contemporaries. Broadcast don't so much define the early noughties as slip free from it, inhabiting instead a tense, unverifiable between-world, surreal and mundane, absurd and malign, yet almost always conveyed via the genre structure of '60s psychedelic pop.

Listening to these three reissues, which take us from their earliest Peel session in 1996 to one of their final recordings before Trish Keenan's tragic death from pneumonia in 2011, is both an unsettling and strangely joyous experience, both emotions often experienced at the same time. The *Maida Vale Sessions* ★★★★ brings together four BBC sessions recorded for John Peel between October 1996 and August 2003, and works as an ideal introduction to Broadcast's dark, transformative power.

One of the first things that's striking about these recordings is how raw and clear they seem without the swirls of psychedelic pastiche that occasionally brought an opaque numbness to the group's first two LPs, 2000's *The Noise Made By People* and 2003's *Haha Sound*. As such, their power now seems greater, closer to the exposed bare-walls minimalism of their finest album, 2005's *Tender Buttons*. The versions of *The Noise...*'s Look Outside, Come On Let's Go and Long Was The Year sound free, naked and unburdened, while Keenan's voice, a hypnotic dream-sleep monotone, beguiles and unnerves. Stripped of its spectral veils, a dark, numinous melancholy overwhelms; a feeling akin to being hypnotised by a somnambulist. If listening to Broadcast was often as much an intellectual exercise as weird pop communion – a ticking off of chic '60s boho references – here it is much closer to a complete letting go or giving in.

The session versions aren't necessarily superior however, just different, often to a disturbing degree. This is most explicit on the *Haha Sound* tracks, recorded in a session from August 19, 2003. Without its layers of reverb and Neil Bullock's rolling jazz drums, the gnomic horror story of Minim ("How sweet the bells/But what can they tell of heaven and hell?") is transformed from a shrouded and mysterious enigma to something stark, human and defeated. Similarly, the linear, ritual-song groove of Pendulum is now terrifyingly present, confrontational almost. Often the effect is almost upsettingly 'real'. Divested of shimmer and delay, the 'dry' session version of Colour Me In no longer sounds like a faded nursery rhyme, a faint apparition trapped between worlds, but a deeply personal statement of the real, as if the "grey, still on the page" person attempting to cross over is already in the room. A similar disquiet is experienced on that session's final track and the last song of the album, an intoxicating, "odylic" (sic) cover of Nico's Sixty Forty in which Keenan seems to no longer be singing herself but giving voice to other entities, other personalities – something she'd later experiment with more explicitly on Broadcast's final LP, their 2009 collaboration with Ghost Box's Julian House, *Broadcast And The Focus Group Investigate Witch Cults Of The Radio Age*.

That idea of the 'other' made manifest is also evoked by listening to *Microtonics* ★★★, the two sets of imitation library music that the group originally released as 3-inch tour-only CDs in 2003 (the *Haha Sound* tour) and 2005 (*Tender Buttons* tour). Both Keenan and Cargill had a deep interest in the odd, experimental world of early-'70s library music (KPM, De Wolfe etc) but were also intrigued by the idea that improvised electronic music could work as a form of mediumship or sorcery. "If the witches of the 17th century [had] made music," Keenan said in 2009, "it would have been playful and hypnotic and made with indecipherable sounds." The music on *Microtonics* is just that, a skittish cross between the anti-music funambulist funk of '70s Italian free-improv collective Il Gruppo, the *musique concrète* of Pierre Schaeffer's Groupe de Recherches Musicales, and the children's TV nightmares of BBC Radiophonic Workshop that might just also be an attempt to cross over into a different territory, more disturbing landscapes beyond the veil.



"Their music is eerie, elegiac, yet imbued with a working-class science-lab optimism."

Both these elements – the articulation of unconscious states and the hermetic formation of new worlds – can be heard on the third reissue, *Mother Is The Milky Way* ★★★★. Originally released as a tour-only CD in 2009 to promote their collaboration with Julian House, this 20-minute EP finds Cargill and Keenan, recently relocated to the bucolic, pagan surrounds of Hungerford, Berkshire, assembling a home-recorded collage of song, flute, wordless melodies, burbling electronics, invented nursery rhyme, skronk jazz, Dada poetry and acoustic guitar. Blended with Hungerford-specific field recordings of tractors, birdsong and children's chatter, the recording initially recalls Trunk Records' 1998 release of *The Wicker Man* soundtrack (which included the film's dialogue and ambient sound effects alongside the music of Magnet and Paul Giovanni) but on a more intimate, local scale, a door in a wall allowing you to hear what might be a '70s folk band reciting occult incantations in a nearby garden, your certainty of place and time clouded by a heavy lysergic fog. Listening to it 12 years after it was recorded, and 11 years on from Keenan's death, it still sounds unknowable, like a record from both the past and the future, from a band that slipped free from the bonds of time and hid away in the dream-world of their own music.

BACK STORY: DOWNSIZING

● Although largely remembered as the duo of Cargill and Keenan, Broadcast began as a quintet with guitarist Tim Felton, keyboardist Roj Stevens and drummer Steve Perkins. They were honest about their inspiration, citing Delia Derbyshire and David Vorhaus's White Noise project and The United States Of America's self-titled 1968 LP with its fusion of West Coast psychedelia, primitive electronics and the sardonic vocal delivery of frontwoman Dorothy Moskowitz. However, a gradual loss of members meant that the ambition to replicate the scale of their influences was compromised, forcing Keenan and Cargill to find new and fresh ways to create ambitious electronic worlds with just the two of them.

Sam Ashley

In a dream-world of their own: Broadcast's Trish Keenan and co crossed over into different musical territories.

Paisley lark: True West (from left) Kevin Staydohar, Russ Tolman, Gavin Blair, Steve Packenham, Richard McGrath – patron saints of acid rock.

Shades of glory

The lost boys of the Paisley Underground get their day in the sun. By **David Fricke**.

True West

★★★★

Kaleidoscope Of Shadows: The Story So Far

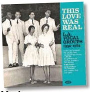
BRING OUT YOUR DEAD. CD

FOR A FEW hot minutes in the early '80s, True West were the most psychedelic band in the American underground. Named after the Sam Shepard play, they came from those exact coordinates: Davis, California, a college town in the farm country north-east of San Francisco, forming in 1982 after a local student combo called the Suspects broke up after one peppy new wave single. Two members, guitarist Steve Wynn and singer (soon bassist) Kendra Smith, went to LA and started The Dream Syndicate. Two other Suspects, guitarist Russ Tolman and drummer Gavin Blair, debuted as True West with an indie 45 cover of Pink Floyd's Lucifer Sam, then added guitarist Richard McGrath for a 1983 self-titled EP – co-produced by Wynn – that supercharged the delirium of '67 London and the Bay Area ballrooms with post-punk tension and Television's biting-treble swordplay. Extra authenticity: the engineer played bass in rave-up legends Oxford Circle, a mid-'60s Davis, California band with future members of Blue Cheer.

The first disc alone in this 3-CD history makes a definitive case for True West's acid-rock sainthood, starting with that EP session and later '83 recordings combined on a European mini-album, *Hollywood Holiday*. Steps To The Door is an angst-ridden march flanked by a long wall of wasp-drone guitars. In I'm Not Here, Blair's trance-like vocal is buffeted by a circular paroxysm of Acid Test percussion and whammy-bar seizure. True West were also rapidly evolving songwriters with a striking – and prophetic – line in modal hooks, urgent choruses and redwood-Gothic foreboding. Look Around, And Then The Rain and Morning Light, all on 1984's *Drifters*, True West's first full-length album, suggest Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds on the prowl in Marin County. Burn The Rain, a jagged diamond from an aborted '83 session produced by Television's Tom Verlaine, now sounds like an early starting gun for the ragged, stomping glories of My Morning Jacket and Howlin Rain.

But line-up turbulence and a losing hand at major-label poker ensured that everything on *Kaleidoscope Of Shadows* happened in just four years: an explosive arrival followed by startling fade as Tolman was gone before 1986's *Hand Of Fate*, True West's second and last LP. Made with guitar assistance from Green On Red's Chuck Prophet and the Rain Parade's Matt Piucci, it has jolts of fight and promise, but you can't help wishing Falling Away and Just One Chance were around for *Drifters* and that someone had bothered to record the classic line-up live from the soundboard. The audience-fidelity tapes that close this set are mostly for fanatics (like me).

Strangely, if only for completion's sake, the B-side of the 1982 single is missing. Mas Reficul was Lucifer Sam played backwards, a low-budget jape that underscored the nerve and dazzle to come. "We've had to work a lot harder to get noticed," Tolman told me at the time, "because we come from the middle of the tomato fields."



Various

★★★★

This Love Was Real: LA Vocal Groups 1959-1964

ACE. CD/DL

Superb soundtrack to the early-'60s LA teen scene.

The title to this great compilation of rare doo wop and cusp-of-soul is taken from a 1964 song by The Showcases. Produced by Cliff Goldsmith and issued on Galaxy, it captures perfectly the ecstasy of longing in its haunted vocal harmonies. Likewise, the previously unheard The Letter by guitarist Adolph Jacobs. Recorded in 1959, it isn't a cover of The Medallions' street corner staple although Jacobs was an erstwhile recruit of the group. Instead it's most likely a self-scribed number that's really quite magnificent with its rich, swooning chorus from Bobby Day plus members of The Coasters, another outfit Jacobs had previously been in. A rapturous Hold Me by Dorothy Berry & The Swans from 1961 plus Bobby Sheen's tormented This Wilted Rosebud from the following year provide further magic moments.

Lois Wilson

Various

★★★★

Lèspri Ka: New Directions In Gwoka Music From Guadeloupe 1981-2010

TIME CAPSULE. DL/LP

Absorbing exploration of gwoka moderne's evolution.

Rooted in the drumming and dancing traditions practised clandestinely prior to the island's emancipation, traditional gwoka call-and-response began appearing on vinyl in the early 1960s, and guitarist Gérard Lockel later tried to modernise the form through modal and atonal melodies, until a new vanguard finally incorporated broader jazz elements in the early '80s, attracting the interest of Miles Davis, Pharoah Sanders and Randy Weston. Most of the music featured on this 2-LP set is little known outside the French Caribbean and the deep dive yields plenty of shimmering discoveries: Dao's Chen'n La and Gaoulé Mizik's Sonné Lékla Sonné recall Count Ossie's *Tales of Mozambique*, Michel Laurent's Matla La Mouyé and Selekta Ka's Nou Woukou Mansé A Zero have shades of zouk, while Thibault 'Freydy' Doressamy's O Fon A Kê An Nou is a psychedelic entreaty to God.

David Katz

Calvin Keys

★★★

Proceed With Caution!

REAL GONE. CD/DL/LP

Cult mid-'70s jazz album rides again.

"Calvin Keys is an innovator destined for greatness!" proclaimed this album's liner-notes back in 1974, the writer seemingly oblivious to the curse that accompanies such hyperbolic statements. Indeed, Keys, a guitarist from Omaha, Nebraska, toiled as a sideman for many years afterwards, and although he continued to record LPs under his own name, never became the jazz superstar some predicted. Even so, there are slivers of brilliance in the spacey, fusion-esque soundscapes on this, his second and final album for the Bay Area's Black Jazz imprint. Surrounded by exceptional musicians – including future Weather Report drummer Leon 'Ndugu' Chancler, saxophonist Charles Owens and pianist Kirk Lightsey – Keys is adept at creating texture and atmosphere, especially on the gently soughing Tradewinds and hypnotic Renaissance. On the best cut, Aunt Lovey, he serves up a delectable funk groove.

Charles Waring

Carambolage

★★★★

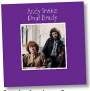
Carambolage

TAPETE. CD/DL/LP

Germany's turn-of-the-'80s answer to The Slits.

Against the grain of the *Neue Deutsche Welle*, with its sanitised upgrading of punk aesthetics, Carambolage had audible edge: they coalesced around hippy radicals Ton Steine Scherben, for whom drummer Britta Neander debuted on percussion in the mid '70s, and whose axe hero, R.P.S. Lanrue, was Carambolage singer Elfie-Esther Steitz's elder brother. Lanrue and TSS mainman Rio Reiser produced this self-titled debut from 1980, which packs a contagious joy in carving out a challenging female voice from estimable post-punk skills. "So ladies and semen, are you ready? Time to go shopping," spits Steitz *auf Deutsch* on the anti-consumerist City-Großmarkt. Elsewhere, skittering beats and Angie Olbrich's hooky basslines throw the madcap frontwoman into ever-spiky, Ari Up-esque relief. Two further LPs, also reissued by Tapete, saw their rough edges smoothed off, but the only thing that separated Carambolage from Kleenex-style adoration abroad, surely, was the language barrier.

Andrew Perry



Andy Irvine & Paul Brady

★★★★★

Andy Irvine/Paul Brady

MULLIGAN. LP

Elaborate re-packaging of a key Irish folk album.

At the time it didn't promise much – just a bit of a stopgap for Irvine and Brady while they figured out what to do next after the break-up of the revered Planxty. But undefinable magic unfolded when these two kindred spirits recruited the great fiddle player Kevin Burke and string rhythm maestro Dónal Lunny to join them in Rockfield Studios, Wales that hot summer in 1976. The results were exquisite. Brady's showstopping arrangement of Arthur McBride merited all the plaudits, but the dexterity of Irvine's playing and singing on Plains Of Kildare and his own haunting Autumn Gold, along with Brady's peerless storytelling of Mary And The Soldier and Lough Erne Shore confirm the album's classic status. It was a golden age for Irish folk music and this is one of its defining moments. All that, plus some grand packaging (including a 12,000-word Gareth Murphy essay) and an LP on purple vinyl.

Colin Irwin

Fruit Bats

★★★★

Sometimes A Cloud Is Just A Cloud: Slow Growers, Sleeper Hits And Lost Songs (2001-2021)

MERGE. CD/DL/LP

Casting light on a hidden gem of the 21st century cosmic Americana scene.

Kindred spirits of My Morning Jacket and The Flaming Lips, it speaks to the recent abundance of high-grade cosmic Americana that Chicago practitioners Fruit Bats aren't better known. The group's scattered *oeuvre* is granted an authoritative overview on this two-disc set, which begins its journey at the current day, working back to their origins. This approach offers a reverse-image of their evolution, from the accomplished, feather-light amalgam of classic rock and psychedelia achieved on new track Rips Me Up (Eric D Johnson's star-gazing croak enriched by blossoming backing harmonies), to more bare-bones magic like the playful lysergic folk of Glass In My Feet from their debut *Echolocation*. The standard of their warped, winning melodic contortions is commendably high throughout, though a disc of rarities turns up both diamonds (the galloping, urgent beauty of WACS) and doggerel (a winsome cover of Steve Miller's The Joker).

Stevie Chick

The Times

★★★★

My Picture Gallery: The Artpop! Recordings

CHERRY RED. CD/DL

Six LPs and more from key influence on Alan McGee.

Between 1980 and '86, The Times, helmed by Edward Ball, recorded six LPs bookended by *Go! With The Times* and *Enjoy…* and including *Up Against It*, their soundtrack to Joe Orton's Beatles screenplay. These, plus umpteen 45s and 12-inch bonuses make up this 6-CD box. While singles were primarily an outlet for Ball's '60s Mod fetish – see Red With Purple Flashes and I Helped Patrick McGoohan Escape, both giddy rushes of DIY pop – albums telegraphed political discontent and societal unease. 1984's *Hello Europe*, part of Ball's *Quadrophenia*-like Frank Summit trilogy, forewarned the catastrophic divisions that led to Brexit. In 1987 Ball put the band on hold to become chief of staff at Creation, later to return with a very different sounding Times. Their best work is here.

Lois Wilson

The Divine Comedy

★★★★

Charmed Life – The Best Of The Divine Comedy

DIVINE COMEDY. CD/DL/LP

Jobbing composer takes greatest hits pit stop.

On paper, Neil Hannon penning the songs for next year's Charlie And The Chocolate Factory prequel, Wonka, looks promising, and here are 24 golden tickets he found earlier. Full of arch chamber-pop nuggets and mini cultural snapshots (National Express; Generation Sex), *Charmed Life* evidences one of pop's most ingenious minds, Hannon's inventions especially impressive when stacked back to back. Courtship song Songs Of Love, his second attempt at a theme tune for Father Ted – and here with words – is charming indeed, while Norman & Norma must surely be the best ever song about a long-term marriage rejuvenated by medieval battle re-enactment. New track The Best Mistakes, meanwhile, is classic Hannon, all baroque strings and wonderment at where he currently finds himself. The limited-edition 3-CD version packs more previously unreleased tracks, including Those Pesky Kids.

James McNair

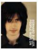
Bernard Butler

★★★★

People Move On

DEMON. CD/DL/LP

Guitarist calls his 1998 debut, "a majestic train wreck of emotion".



Butler's tenures with Suede and David McAlmont produced Brit-pop-era riches but also untimely feuds; going solo, handling all bar drums and strings, ensured no tragic denouements. A palpable shedding of tension underpinned these 63 minutes centred on the creamiest vibrato guitar since Mick Ronson, and strings that mined Phil Spector and Ivor Raymonde models. Though Butler was singing about finding love on Woman I Know, the album's opening salvo "Well I feel so alive/Got no reason to hide" nailed his mindset, reaching its river-deep, mountain-high apogee on the nine-minute Autograph. Unfortunately, callow singing (and prosaic lyrics, the opposite of Brett Anderson's rococo style) strained to keep up, but CD2 here is the album with re-recorded vocals; 50-year-old Butler's soulful grain resembles a different singer. And Butler being Butler, he can't help adding additional guitar overdubs.

Martin Aston

Fela Kuti

★★★★

Boxset 5

KNITTING FACTORY. LP

Limited-edition lavish box set co-curated by Femi Kuti and Coldplay's Chris Martin.

Seven vinyl albums, each one wrapped in replica artwork, with a poster designed by Fela Kuti's erstwhile sleeve artist Lemi Ghariokwu housed in a box. The earliest inclusion, 1971's *Why Black Man Dey Suffer*, features Ginger Baker alongside Tony Allen, templates Afrobeat and lyrically fanfares Kuti's frontline dispatches approach. The latest, 1989's *O.D.O.O. (Overtake Don Overtake Overtake)*, his penultimate recording, captures a musician still angry, with revolt in his sights. In between, four mid-'70s outings, all hotbeds of social political discourse, cloaked in terse horns and pulsing with percussive jazz energy; the best being *Kalakuta Show*, from 1976; mournful, searing and empowering in equal measure. Completing this deluxe package, 1981's *Original Suffer Head*, Kuti's first with new band Egypt 80, who take the groove to new levels of sophistication.

Lois Wilson

Various

★★★★

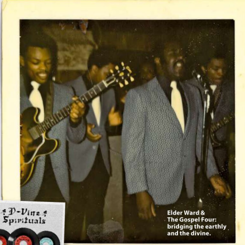
Sacred Soul: The D-Vine Spirituals Records Story Vol. 1

BIBLE & TIRE. CD/DL/LP

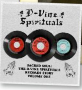
Great Memphis gospel spanning 1972 to '86.

IN 1970, Pastor Juan D Shipp and hillbilly bandleader Clyde Leopard got together in a Memphis coffee shop to form D-Vine Spirituals Records. With the company brief "to sing like you're making love to God", the label's 1972 debut I Heard The Voice by Elizabeth King captures the *ne plus ultra* of soulful artistry, with King sounding soft and sweet but also delivering an impassioned rasp when necessary. Bridging the earthly and divine, the 45 did well locally and, until 1986 when it folded, the label became home to some of the finest Southern testifiers. King begins this first of two volumes mapping the label's varied approach to worship. It also takes in revival from The Seven Brothers, blues from Elder Ward and Evelyn Taylor's impressive exhortations.

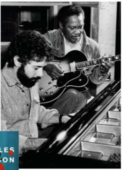
Lois Wilson



Elder Ward & The Gospel Four: bridging the earthly and the divine.



MPS people: (clockwise from below) Oscar Peterson entertains the locals; producer Hans Georg Brunner-Schwer; Monty Alexander (left) and Ernest Ranglin in the studio; a pick of the label's winners.



FILE UNDER...

Black Forest Chateau

Some of the biggest names in jazz found their sound in a villa in the heart of Germany. By **Jim Irvin**.

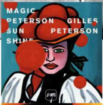
IN 1958, the co-owner of the German electronics manufacturer SABA, Hans Georg Brunner-Schwer, an expert in sound equipment, accomplished pianist and knowledgeable jazz fan, built a recording studio in his villa in Villingen-Schwenningen in the Black Forest region.

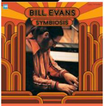
When Oscar Peterson came to Zurich to perform a concert in 1961, Brunner-Schwer invited him to his home studio, promising him the best sound he'd ever heard. Peterson was indeed impressed by HGBS's crystalline recording of the performance he gave at the house: "I never heard myself like this before…" He returned every year for similar events, making recordings which couldn't be released commercially while Peterson was under contract to Verve, but which circulated nonetheless among connoisseurs.

In 1968, Brunner-Schwer left SABA to start his own jazz label, MPS, standing for Musik Produktion Schwarzwald, "Black Forest music productions," but later advertised as "Most Perfect Sound". In effect it became a German equivalent of Blue Note, a jazz label famed for its sound, in this case one of startling clarity, where pianos sparkle, hi-hats glisten and bass notes exude a warm pressure not apparent in lesser recordings.

Once word got around about the quality of the work coming out of MPS, major names in jazz – Dizzy Gillespie, Cecil Taylor, Sun Ra, Freddie Hubbard, Joe Henderson and Jim Hall – began coming to Germany to record with Brunner-Schwer and he began to travel to visit them. Though he specialised in pianists – in addition to Peterson were Bill Evans, Count Basie, veteran Brit George Shearing and the playful Jamaican pianist Monty Alexander – he recorded all kinds of musicians. He was fond of jazz violinists Jean-Luc Ponty, Don 'Sugarcane' Harris, the great Stéphane Grappelli and, from a younger generation, Didier Lockwood. He also, naturally, recorded the cream of German jazz players, among them Volker Kriegel, Wolfgang Dauner, and brothers Joachim and Rolf Kühn, plus artists from across the globe: limpid Brazilian guitarist Baden Powell, Indian sarod player Ali Akbar Khan and crossover funk-meister George Duke, who became a label favourite.

In 1983, when the budgets for recording jazz had irrevocably dwindled, Brunner-Schwer switched to recording classical music, bringing the same quality to his HGBS label, and leased the rights to MPS to Polydor. Ten years after his death in 2004, Edel records took over the catalogue and now Brunner-Schwer's son Andreas and long-time colleague Friedhelm Schulz head the team recording once again in Villingen. New artists include singers Malia and China Moses, Brazilian mandolinist Hamilton De Holanda, and the German trio led by pianist Julia Kadel, who were the first jazz artists to record in the villa in four decades.





"In effect, MPS became a German equivalent of Blue Note."

MPS is officially relaunched this month with a slew of new recordings, over 100 titles from the catalogue newly available to stream, and a core score of its legacy titles available again on vinyl and CD.

These include: *Exclusively For My Friends* ★★★★, an 8-CD box of those shimmering Oscar Peterson recordings, *Magic Peterson Sunshine* ★★★★, a fascinating compilation of label favourites by Gilles Peterson (no relation), six titles by George Duke, including 1974's *Feel* ★★★★, which features Flora Purim and Frank Zappa; swinging singer Mark Murphy's 1968 album *Midnight Mood* ★★★★ (originally on SABA); Baden Powell's gorgeous *Images On Guitar* ★★★★, Ella Fitzgerald's stirring 1968 show recorded in San Francisco, *Sunshine Of Your Love* ★★★, in its vivid yellow sleeve. In equally arresting bright orange garb, there's Bill Evans' *Symbiosis* ★★★★★, an album of bold, rousing big-band compositions, where Bill comes on like Gil Evans. Just one highlight in a catalogue of more than 500 recordings that all jazz fans will want to explore.

MPS Archive (3)

Sparks

★★★★★

The Sparks Brothers

WAXWORK. DL/LP

The original soundtrack to Edgar Wright's acclaimed documentary.

Plundering five decades of Sparks across a 4-LP box set, this rough chronology flags Ron and Russell Mael's enduring worth as day-brighteners and outré pop voyagers. A world without Sparks, we're reminded, would be like a world *sans* elephants, something enchantingly unique lost. Lovely to hear author Neil Gaiman demonstrate how Amateur Hour's study of adolescent stirrings becomes crystalline when its lyrics are read aloud, plus there's a baroque strings-and-vocal version of This Town Ain't Big Enough For Both Of Us. Though it's the period live tracks that capture the hysteria of peak Sparks ("For everybody's safety I think we should have a little more restraint in the hall," says Russell at one point), later offerings such as Dick Around and Edith Piaf (Said It Better Than Me) reflect a playfully-postmodern duo forever reaching for re-invention.

James McNair

James White & The Blacks

★★★★

Melt Yourself Down

MODERN HARMONIC. CD/DL/LP

Rare Japan-only 1986 LP from New York no wave singer/saxophonist.

His James White alias allowed bequiffed jazz-punker James Chance ample space to indulge his obsession with The Godfather Of Soul. He went straight to the source on his third outing, building on the pounding groove of Superbad and walking the wilder side of Cold Sweat, sexing up James Brown's originals with free-style rhymes and agitated screams. A piano-led, Wendy Whitelaw-sung flip on Hot Voodoo (from 1932 Marlene Dietrich film Blonde Venus) adds levity to the fidgety funk grooves of the title track (so powerful it spawned a band) and Hell On Earth, extended jams that let White's jittery alto sax squeak and squawk away with Ornette Coleman-like abandon. A trio of live CD extras show how White's vocal limitations are no impediment to party starting.

Andy Cowan

Movietone

★★★★

Peel Sessions 1994-1997

TEXTILE. CD/LP

The haunted sound of '90s Bristol is back, back, back.

There is something unearthly in the music Kate Wright made with Movietone. Although they comprised various members of other '90s Bristol 'post-rock' outfits such as Crescent, Flying Saucer Attack and Third Eye Foundation, their sound was defined by Wright's imagistic lyrics, unique rhythm guitar sound – Wes Montgomery's ghost summoned via an arcane outdoor ritual – and a voice which could move from Kim Gordon rage and attack to spectral late-night Sibylle Baier sadness. The release of these 11 tracks, originally recorded for John Peel at BBC's Maida Vale Studios, feels like a genuine event. They contain alternative versions of songs from the group's first three records, *Movietone*, *Day And Night* and *The Blossom Filled Streets*, but in their spare and cold manner feel closer to their final and greatest work, 2003's *The Sand And The Stars*, both records existing in an other-worldly space that feels simultaneously hypnotic, primordial and utterly spine-chilling.

Andrew Male

Andrew Weatherall

★★★★★

Heavenly Remixes Vol. 3 & 4

HEAVENLY. CD/DL/LP

The late Lord Sabre's inspirational makeovers for UK indie's roster.

Remix culture, which propelled musically untutored acid-house DJs into production, was a better idea in theory than in practice – until Andrew Weatherall. After his savant debut on Primal Scream's Loaded, Weatherall of course went on to produce much of *Screamadelica*, but concurrently racked up further studio experience thanks to his new manager, Heavenly's Jeff Barrett. Barrett commissioned numerous remixes for the label, many of which (for Sly & Lovechild, Saint Etienne, Espiritu and particularly Flowered Up, all included here) equally revealed AW's visionary qualities – exploratory, cosmic, dubby, extraordinarily musical (considering he didn't play an instrument), and playful. For those mid-'90s aficionados who couldn't keep pace with his productivity, the latter-day stuff (a tech-funk masterclass for Confidence Man's Bubblegum; Slits-y post-punk on Audiobooks' Dance Your Life Away) is every bit as exceptional and mind-bending. Rescuing these 16 cuts from digital oblivion, *Heavenly Remixes Vol. 3 & 4* explains why the house fraternity called Weatherall the Guv'nor.

Andrew Perry

Nick Lowe

★★★★

The Impossible Bird

YEP ROC. CD/DL/LP

Minimalist country/rockabilly from 1994; plus 1998 follow-up *Dig My Mood*.

With hindsight, 10 of these 13 tracks come on like eminently coverable songs hiding in plain sight. You wonder what Elvis might have done with stand-out track The Beast In Me, had he not died 17 years before its release, or how Robert Plant and Alison Krauss might shape Cajun rockabilly gem 12-Step Program (To Quit You Babe) if they chanced upon it today. Mostly writing from a place of regret (Withered On The Vine), emotional conflict (I Live On A Battlefield), or sorrow (Lover Don't Go), Lowe honed these songs to stand modestly adorned, hence organist Geraint Watkins and guitarist Gary Grainger excel at holding back. We also get Lowe's empathetic cover of Dallas Frazier and A.L. Owens' True Love Travels On A Gravel Road, that title a neat summation of *The Impossible Bird*'s purview.

James McNair

Various

★★★

Lenny Kaye Presents: Lightning Striking

ACE. CD/DL

Wide-ranging soundtrack to Kaye's 2021 book.

Lenny Kaye is the guitarist in Patti Smith's band and compiler of the formative *Nuggets* compilation. This isn't a follow-up to that, rather a 48-track, 2-CD playlist to his part memoir/part rock-centric (his words) music history of the same name published last year. It begins with The Boswell Sisters' atmospheric Rock And Roll from 1934 and ends with 2015's bubblegum Gimme Chocolate!! by trash metal/J-pop combo Babymetal. The link: "transformative moments" when, for Kaye, lightning struck and rock'n'roll evolved. So, we also get Elvis, Howlin' Wolf, Stooges, Ramones, Blondie and a couple of rarities: a raw, blistering stereo take of the MC5's Looking At You and the author's own beaty Crazy Like A Fox from 1966, issued under the alias Link Cromwell.

Lois Wilson

Various

★★★★

Life Between Islands: Soundsystem Culture: Black Musical Expression In The UK 1973-2006

SOUL JAZZ. CD/DL/LP

Expansive comp highlighting the enduring impact of Black British soundsystem culture.

A song for the lovers rock: Brown Sugar bring the late-'70s shebeen vibes.

PRODUCED TO accompany the Tate Modern's acclaimed exhibition, *Life Between Islands* provides shuffle-mode snapshots of the more important musical forms that evolved from the soundsystem culture pervasive in diverse Black British communities. As explored in Lloyd Bradley's insightful notes, the roots reggae of Black Slate, proto-jungle of Ragga Twins and rumbling dubstep of Digital Mystikz all draw from the soundsystem experience, the compilation emphasising the distinctive niches carved out by pioneers. Thus, Pebbles' toasting cut of Errol Dunkley's A Little Way Different, expertly produced by Dennis Bovell, conjures the community centres and blues parties where soundsystems flourished, and lovers rock is returned to at key intervals. Brown Sugar's Black Pride and Janet Kay and Alton Ellis's take of Still In Love are both redolent of late-'70s shebeens; we also get the hybrid funk of Cymande and Harry Beckett's multidimensional jazz.

David Katz

Gregory Isaacs
★★★
Showcase
TAXI/HIGH POWER MUSIC. CD/LP

GI's extended mixes, with the Rhythm Twins: Sly Dunbar and the late Robbie Shakespeare.

After forging strong professional bonds touring with Peter Tosh in the mid-1970s, drum-and-bass stalwarts Sly and Robbie launched into record production, the first significant hit on their Taxi label arriving with Gregory Isaacs' sensual Soon Forward. Released in Jamaica in limited numbers in 1980, the *Showcase* album was comprised of the six songs Isaacs voiced for the duo in this early phase, all but one presented 'showcase' style, where the vocal is followed by an extended dub portion. Motherless Children is a forceful diatribe decrying Jamaica's endemic poverty and Going Down Town speaks of the symbolic power of the sound systems, defiantly rejecting the island's colonial hangovers. A decent version of Marley's Slave Driver and a couple of lovelorn tearjerkers evidence Isaacs' versatility, though the thunderous dub mixes with their subtle percussive touches really give the set its greatest appeal.
David Katz

Various
★★★★
British Mod Sounds Of The 1960s
DEMON. CD/LP

Six-LP deep dive into the '60s Mod scene.

Pulled together by Acid Jazz founder and Mod bigwig Eddie Piller, *British Mod Sounds Of The 1960s* provides an exhaustive trawl through some of the homegrown R&B that would have been raving up subterranean sweatboxes for the mid-'60s in-crowd. Alongside gems from familiar faces (the debut from proto-Who The High Numbers; the drama-filled powerpop of Can't Help Thinking Of Me by then-unknown David Bowie), the curios and lesser-known tracks are the real draw: the London scene shouts-outs on Mike Stevens & The Shevelles' The Go-Go Train or Garage Man by The Gods, a fuzztoned tale of automobile woe that sounds remarkably like ferocious '80s Mod revivalists The Prisoners. There's a lot of it, nearly five hours' worth, but you don't need to have a working knowledge of the inside of a Lambretta to enjoy the sharp-suited sounds here.
Chris Catchpole

Various
★★★★★
Summer Of Soul (… Or, When The Revolution Could Not Be Televised) OST
LEGACY. DL/LP

Soundtrack to the Questlove documentary and one of the all-time great live albums.

Seventeen performances taken from the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival, bookended by The Chambers Brothers' exultant Uptown and Nina Simone's insurrectionist Are You Ready. Like the film they soundtrack, they provide both compelling social, cultural, and political history and an extraordinary in-concert experience. The best bits alongside the forenamed: a Temptations-transitioning David Ruffin reclaiming My Girl; Gladys and her Pips socking it to 'em with I Heard It Through The Grapevine; Mahalia Jackson and Mavis Staples' Precious Lord, Take My Hand, the sound of freedom through exhortation; and the conscience-awakening power of Sly And The Family Stone's Everyday People. There's n o Stevie Wonder or Hugh Masekela (licensing problems or saved for Volume 2 perhaps?). Nevertheless, this is as perfect as any album can be.
Lois Wilson

COMING NEXT MONTH…
Mattiel, Michael Rother, Keeley Forsyth, Thurston Moore, Soft Cell, Midlake, Johnny Marr (pictured), Bill Frisell and more.

Andrew Cotterill

REISSUES EXTRA

Hector
★★★
Demolition
RADIATION. CD

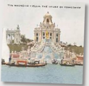
Junk shop glam cults from Portsmouth, Hector's early '70s revisited, with unreleased tracks, outtakes and more. For obsessives-only, rough in parts, but 45s Wired Up and Bye Bye Bad Days (which appears in three versions) are top-drawer Slade-style pre-punk boogie. *IH*

Joy Division
★★★★
Still
RHINO. LP

Forty years on, in a spiffed-up 'ruby red' sleeve on clear vinyl, this posthumous outtakes and live comp still bursts with preternatural, Orphic promise. The raw last gig recording has deathly connotations, but the magic's fiercely alive. *IH*

Thomas Leer & Robert Rental
★★★★
The Bridge
THE GREY AREA OF MUTE. CD/LP

On wax for the first time since 1979 release on Throbbing Gristle's label, invention-over-technical limitations synth strangeness from Port Glasgow. Near-pop in parts, coldly abstract in others, it sounds antique and futuristic at the same time. *IH*

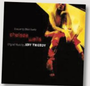


Magnetic Fields
★★★★
The House Of Tomorrow
MERGE. LP

First time on vinyl for excellent, 30-year-old EP. Stephin Merritt was, he says, in thrall to JAMC at the time. East Kilbride's exotic adopted son emerges from tinny, mechanised sounding riffola in a rich, lachrymose baritone (Alien Being). Whilst Young & Insane has a whiff of early Bunnymen. *JB*

Paul McCartney & Wings
★★★
Wild Life
UME. LP

Limited 2-LP of Macca's first with Wings (Linda, Dennys Seiwell and Laine). Wince at Give Ireland Back To The Irish, but Mickey & Sylvia's Love Is Strange is a reggae-lite delight. Lennon-directed Dear Friend is particularly devastating as a home recording on LP2. *JB*



Jeff Tweedy
★★★★
Chelsea Walls OST
OMNIVORE. CD/LP

Oft-overlooked Tweedy soundtrack to an Ethan Hawke movie revealed, 21 years on, as a critical point in the evolution of Wilco. Drummer Glenn Kotche arrives for the sort of improv sessions and roots/post-rock workouts that proved catalytic for *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*. First time on vinyl; bonus tracks too. *JM*

U-Roy
★★★★
Version Galore
DOCTOR BIRD. CD

Treasure Isle producer Duke Reid was Jamaica's late-'60s king of rocksteady, so when he joined up with the era's premier deejay U-Roy, it was musical dynamite. This 1970 debut (plus 30 extra tracks) from 'The Originator' is genre-defining, U-Roy's jive-talk flow riding the exquisite rhythms in fine style. *SM*

Various
★★★
C91
CHERRY RED. CD

1991's indie strivers and success stories, over three nugget-selecting discs. Shoegazers, indie dancers, jangly diehards and more play on, unaware that in a few post-crossover years its inkies-and-toilet circuit scene will sink beneath the waves. Better enjoy it, quick. *IH*

Various
★★★★
Straight To The Head
DOCTOR BIRD. CD

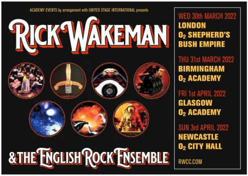
A 27-track 1970 collection of early reggae cuts has producer Joe Gibbs in the ascendant, with stellar work from vocal group The Immortals and crack studio band The Destroyers. Best of all is Johnny Lover's nimble toasting on the title track, while rarely-recorded deejay Count Matchuki is exuberant on Movements. *SM*

RATINGS & FORMATS

Your guide to the month's best music is now even more definitive with our handy format guide.
CD COMPACT DISC DL DOWNLOAD ST STREAMING LP VINYL
MC CASSETTE DVD DIGITAL VIDEO DISC C IN CINEMAS BR BLU-RAY

★★★★★ MOJO CLASSIC ★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★ GOOD ★★ DISAPPOINTING ★ BEST AVOIDED ☆ DEPLORABLE

Academy Events present



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Slice girls: The Cake (from left) Barbara Morillo, Eleanor Barooshian and Jeanette Jacobs on the The Woody Woodbury Show, December 1967.

Ed Caraeff

CREDITS

Tracks: Baby That's Me/World Of Dreams/You Can Have Him/ Medieval Love/Fire Fly/ Rainbow Wood/I Know/Mocking Bird/ Ooh Poo Pah Doo/ Stand By Me/What'd I Say

Personnel: Barbara Morillo, Jeanette Jacobs, Eleanor Barooshian (vocals), Harold Battiste (arrangement), Dr John (piano, organ), sundry session players

Producers: Charles Greene, Brian Stone

Released: December 1967

Recorded: Gold Star Studios, Los Angeles

Chart peak: n/a

Current availability: Streaming services

Pudding too hard

This month's rediscovered delicacy: an acid girl group plays baroque R&B.

The Cake
The Cake

DECCA, 1967

MAMAS & THE PAPAS singer Michelle Phillips wasn't expecting any pushback when she refused to let a young female vocal trio called The Cake backstage at Monterey Pop in June 1967. But as founding member and songwriter Barbara Morillo recalls today, their friend Eric Burdon was not pleased: "He said, 'You're going to give passes to The Cake – or we're pulling The Animals and Jimi Hendrix off the show!'"

The Cake gained entry, talked to their pal Hendrix and marvelled at the "unbelievable spread of food". Bronx-raised Morillo didn't see much music that day, however, distracted as she was by the festival's forest setting and communal tripping. "In the Bronx," she says, "there wasn't even a tree on my block. It was just pavement… and assholes."

The androgynously-styled teenage a cappella trio from New York had formed the previous summer after Morillo and fellow voice Jeanette Jacobs met after a party in Manhattan. They soon moved into the latter's dad Buster's Queens apartment and started recording their songs on a reel-to-reel. Eleanor Barooshian, who can be seen singing with Tiny Tim on 1968 movie You Are What You Eat, completed the line-up after the group bonded on LSD. Drawing inspiration from the British invasion, The Cake arranged baroque harmonies in a choral structure, influenced, in part, by Morillo's background in a Lutheran school choir, and, they recalled, sang to anyone who would listen.

Five months before Monterey, The Cake had attended a Buffalo Springfield gig at their local haunt, Ondine, and were spotted by the band's management, Charles Greene and Brian Stone. "We sang our material and they said, 'We're going to put you in the studio tomorrow to do a demo,'" recalls Morillo. They arrived with recordings of their songs: instead, the group were asked to sing R&B covers over pre-recorded instrumentals. After two months, they signed to Decca and moved to a small apartment on Sycamore Avenue in Hollywood.

After experiencing Monterey in their first week, they went into Gold Star Studios with recording heavyweights including Harold Battiste, Dr. John and members of the Wrecking Crew. "Our managers said, 'These are the songs you'll be doing today,' and there were no originals," remembers Morillo. "I was in shock. [They] said, 'You can do that after you become famous'. I just felt this betrayal."

Upon hearing the reverberatory intro to Jack Nitzsche and Jackie DeShannon's Baby That's Me, a song previously recorded by Lesley Gore and The Fashions, it seemed The Cake's debut would be conventional girl group fare. Morillo also had reservations, saying, "We're from New York. We never say, 'Oh, gee.'" Despite her concerns, the familiar Wall Of Sound production added an intensity previous versions lacked, complemented by The Cake's haunting vocal arrangement.

Notions of well-crafted pop normality were abruptly disrupted, however, when a horn and woodwind glissando introduced The Cake's now-management-sanctioned original material. A rags-to-riches reverie, Medieval Love had a stripped, regimented string arrangement by Battiste, lending Morillo and Jacobs' reflections on courtly love and golden prizes a strange unreality. Borne on piercing harmonies, the dramatic Fire Fly suggests The Shangri-Las' Remember (Walking In The Sand) had it appeared on *Rubber Soul*, while folk-horror conjuration Rainbow Wood amps up the lysergic mood to eerie/ethereal effect.

Able to write strong material and reinventing girl group norms for their increasingly psychedelic moment, The Cake's spirited R&B covers of Ray Charles a nd Ben E. King also promised broad appeal. Decca invested in a considerable promotional push: one billboard in '67 read, 'You Are Looking At The Group That Will Be To Music 1968 What The Beatles Were To Music 1964'. Yet, banned from the Miss America Pageant and TV's The Joey Bishop Show for their supposedly libertine ways and general refusal to cooperate, The Cake's big breakthrough did not happen. Amid deteriorating relations with management, a disillusioned Morillo confided in Hendrix, who they'd met before he was famous outside Greenwich Village's Café Wha?. "I remember crying to Jimi that I didn't like what was happening," she says. "He said, 'Well, I'm going to bring you to England and we're going to do what you want to do.'"

The trip never materialised, and after returning to New York during the recording of 1968's scrappy follow-up album, *A Slice Of Cake*, Morillo met Hendrix again. "He was getting into heroin," she says. "He said, 'This will make everything all right.' I was disturbed. I knew he was going to die."

Morillo left soon after, and the group disbanded. "[Jeanette and Eleanor] moved to England with Dr. John and he called [for me to go too]," she says. "I said no, because everybody was getting into heroin." Barooshian and Jacobs, who would marry Traffic's Chris Wood, also sang with Ginger Baker's Airforce: they were, respectively, immortalised in song in Kevin Ayers' Eleanor's Cake (Which Ate Her) and Wings' Medicine Jar. In 1980, Morillo joined The Golden Dragon, led by jazz fusion guitarist Ryo Kawasaki, and toured Japan. In 2006, she and Barooshian briefly re-formed The Cake for a Hendrix tribute show in New York. "Jeanette died at 32," says Morillo, "and Eleanor died a couple of years ago. I had to survive."

James Allen

"I was in shock… I just felt this betrayal."
BARBARA MORILLO

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Don't forget about me: Dusty Springfield expressed vulnerability and intimacy in seemingly throwaway pop.

Dusty Springfield

Who's a 1960s pop genius? Dusty… definitely. By **Andrew Male**.

IN 1966 DUSTY Springfield was the world's biggest-selling female artist. If that reads like an unlikely statement in 2022, it's some indication of how her star and her reputation have waned in recent years. The woman born Mary Isabel Catherine O'Brien in West Hampstead in 1939, grew up in a dysfunctional if musical middle-class family and started singing with her brother Tom in folk clubs and holiday camps, eventually forming their own folk-pop trio.

It was with the release of her first solo single, I Only Want To Be With You, in November 1963 that her identity began to emerge: a bouffant and mascara'd British reboot of the Brill Building girl group sound with a perfect pitch mezzo-soprano who could find joy and liberation in songs of heartbreak and despair; a vulnerability and intimacy in seemingly perky, throwaway pop. The hits kept coming – I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself, You Don't Have To Say You Love Me, Goin' Back – three-minute pop songs into which Dusty put a short story's worth of emotion, but it wasn't easy. Springfield needed a sympathetic and tolerant producer to manage her anxieties in the studio. In the UK that was Johnny Franz, but with her move to Atlantic Records in 1968 her unease grew greater along with severe mood swings, and a need to numb the anxiety with pills and booze. Excellent albums continued into the '70s but sales declined, recording sessions were abandoned, and Springfield began to hide from the public eye, especially when newspapers became interested in her sexuality and her relationships with American folk singer Norma Tanega and animal rights activist Marsha Barbi.

A career turnaround came in 1987 when the Pet Shop Boys invited her to sing on What Have I Done To Deserve This? and collaborated with her on 1990's *Reputation* LP, but since her death in 1999, aged just 59, her catalogue has quietly undergone a spring clean with lost sessions and abandoned albums gradually seeing the light of day. Hopefully, this list will make some sense of that while re-establishing Dusty's reputation as one of the greatest popular singers of all time.

> "She could find joy and liberation in songs of heartbreak and despair."

CAST YOUR VOTES…

This month you chose your Top 10 Dusty Springfield LPs. Next month we want your Ash Ra Tempel and solo Top 10. Send selections via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or e-mail to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk with the subject 'How To Buy Ash Ra Tempel and solo' and we'll print the best comments.

10 Dusty Springfield
White Heat
CASABLANCA, 1982

You say: **"*White Heat* is a fantastic piece of electro weirdness including the perv masterpiece Soft Core." @Liznaylor1, via Twitter**

The late-period LP Springfield was most proud of. Written while she was dating Canadian punk performer and radical lesbian Carole Pope, it's the sound of a singer accepting the now deeper range of her voice and also her queer identity. Recorded with noted British musicians Caleb Quaye and Nicky Hopkins, but rich in '80s new wave keyboards, it includes some of her most impassioned and angrily honest vocal performances (Time And Time Again; Soft Core) and a show-stopping cover of Elvis Costello's Losing You. A companion album to 1990's Pet Shop Boys collaboration *Reputation*, but perhaps just edging it in terms of quality and originality.

4 Dusty Springfield
Complete A And B Sides 1963-1970
ECLIPSE, 2006

You say: **"I love this compilation. It has the classics, Northern soul floor-fillers and unknown gems." @Maartjejan, via Twitter**

Compiled by Saint Etienne's Bob Stanley, this essential collection presents the perfect case for Springfield's '60s pop genius. One disc covers all of her A-sides from 1963 ebullient debut I Only Want To Be With You to the accordion-led dance of despair that is How Can I Be Sure. However, it's disc two where the hidden gems are, 20 glorious B-sides that reveal what a perfectionist Springfield was in her choice of tracks. Standouts include the haunted autumnal waltz of Summer Is Over, the defiantly cinematic I'm Gonna Leave You and the swirling dramatic title ballad from forgotten Robert Stack thriller, The Corrupt Ones.

Alamy

9 Dusty Springfield
The Complete BBC Sessions

MERCURY/BBC, 2007

You say: "Her version of Higher And Higher? This is what happy sounds like." Hutchie, via e-mail

Dusty singing raw and live in BBC studios from 1962 (three Springfields novelties) to 1970. It's a joy and an education. You effectively hear an artist take the sound and traditions of early-'60s light entertainment and transform them into her own unique and nuanced brand of white soul music (although this in itself reads like a caveat when Dusty is surely up there with such greats as Gladys Knight and Aretha Franklin). Highlights include a stripped-down and funky version of Son Of A Preacher Man that might surpass the version on *Dusty In Memphis*, and a jaw-droppingly raw and pleading version of The Bee Gees' To Love Somebody.

8 Dusty Springfield
Beautiful Soul: The ABC/Dunhill Collection

HIP-O, 2001

You say: "Past her peak, but this is soaking in emotion... that voice." Ian Webster, via Twitter

After Springfield's US contract with Atlantic ended she moved to California and began recording with Lou Adler's Dunhill label. She cut one complete LP, *Cameo*, before abandoning another, *Longing*. The complete sessions collected here are powerful, often painful listening. The singer was drinking and drugging too much, and Dennis Lambert and Brian Potter's *Cameo* production wrap Springfield's voice in a soporific California warmth while the *Longing* sessions, recorded with Phil Spector engineer Brooks Arthur, foreground the soulful despair, especially in her desolate cover of Janis Ian's In The Winter.

7 Dusty Springfield
Come For A Dream: The UK Sessions 1970-1971

RHINO/REAL GONE, 2015

You say: "A great snapshot of a '60s artist moving into a new decade." @Andymack, via Twitter

Recorded at Philips and Trident Studios just as *From Dusty With Love* was hitting the shops, Springfield's final collaboration with Johnny Franz found the singer covering Detroit and Chicago soul tracks (Crumbs Off The Table; Girls It Ain't Easy; O-o-h Child) alongside more wistful, hazy numbers like Basil Kirchin's I Start Counting and the utterly bewitching Let Me Down Easy. However, after Dusty abandoned the project only nine tracks were used for the UK-only LP *See All Her Faces*, bolstered by five Atlantic songs. Hearing the sessions in full here suggests Dusty was wrong and another classic album was lost in the process.

6 Dusty Springfield
Where Am I Going?

PHILIPS, 1967

You say: "Great sleeve, solid tracklisting and a coherent sound." @VinylDigs, via Twitter

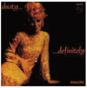
Her third UK studio LP found Dusty working with the country's finest arrangers (Arthur Greenslade, Ivor Raymonde, Wally Stott, Peter Knight, Reg Guest, Johnnie Spence) to create an orch-pop wonder. Released while the singer was touring Australia, it received sparse promotion in the UK and has remained an under-the-radar gem ever since. Dusty's voice is smooth, sophisticated and confident in songs that range from slinky show tunes (the title track) to a splendid cover of Evie Sands' Take Me For A Little While. Saint Etienne fans will already know the LP, given that the intro from I Can't Wait Until I See My Baby's Face was sampled on Nothing Can Stop Us from 1991's *Foxbase Alpha*.

5 Dusty Springfield
A Girl Called Dusty

PHILIPS, 1964

You say: "I adore Dusty. Her first US LP is a cracker: You Don't Own Me, Wishin' And Hopin', great cover." @Michaeldaly1964, via Twitter

The first Dusty album released in the USA was effectively a supercharged version of her British debut *A Girl Called Dusty* supplemented with her first two UK singles, and a bunch of other gems. The marvellous thing about this compilation is that it totally *works*. The devastating emotional power of Anyone Who Had A Heart is a given but her covers of Will You Love Me Tomorrow, Mockingbird and When The Lovelight Starts Shining... are like gauntlets thrown down on the Brill Building steps – as good if not better than the US originals – while Ivor Raymonde's kitchen-sink production of Stay Awhile beats Phil Spector at his own game.



3 Dusty Springfield
Dusty... Definitely

PHILIPS, 1968

You say: "A warm, sophisticated album with immaculate production by Dusty and Johnny Franz." @EddieRobson, via Twitter

The peak of her UK collaborations with Johnny Franz, featuring 12 hand-picked numbers that effectively illustrate both sides of Springfield's personality. Side one is comprised of bass-led Mod club bangers (Ain't No Sun; Love Power) and defiant bossa groovers (Another Night). While side two, which Springfield suggested should be listened to at night, burrows deep into the singer's lonesome soul, from her heart-worn rendition of Randy Newman's I Think It's Going To Rain Today to a soaring, bleak take on Charles Aznavour's Who (Will Take My Place)? and the proto-prog complexities of Morning (Bom Dia) that is reminiscent of a female Scott Walker.

2 Dusty Springfield
A Brand New Me: The Complete Philadelphia Sessions

REAL GONE/ATLANTIC, 2017

You say: "*From Dusty With Love* is up there with *Dusty In Memphis* in my book." @RobertJCotter, via Twitter

By 1969 Dusty was making over £1,000-a-night on the UK and US tour circuit but her private life was in chaos. Some semblance of calm was restored with these magnificent sessions at Philadelphia's Sigma Sound with production-songwriting team Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. Depressed and self-medicating, Springfield invests the duo's bittersweet songs with a euphoric melancholy, as if these small dramas are taking place inside her smudged and bruised soul. The sessions were released as *From Dusty With Love* in the UK, but are best appreciated here with such killer extra tracks as Summer Love and I Wanna Be A Free Girl.

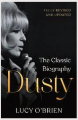
1 Dusty Springfield
Dusty In Memphis

ATLANTIC/PHILIPS, 1969

You say: "For the misty languor, soft-focus eroticism, and just enough of an outsider's perspective on American soul." @Anearful, via Twitter

Working with UK producer Johnny Franz, Springfield had sung at night over blaring wall-of-sound backing tracks; anything to manage her crippling self-consciousness. Now, at Atlantic, producer Jerry Wexler wanted her out front, vulnerable, intimate, calling the shots for a crack team of musicians. It couldn't work, and Springfield eventually cut her vocals separately in New York, but that sultry strut remains, the dark erotic intensity of Springfield's voice supported by the Memphis Horns and the Sweet Inspirations bringing an almost Tennessee Williams-like sophistication to these tales of Southern desire. The 1999 Rhino reissue also includes Springfield's shelved 1971 Atlantic LP, *Faithful*, the 2015 reissue of which is now prohibitively expensive.

NOW DIG THIS



No room for the 1998 Mercury reissue of *Everything's Coming Up Dusty*, which includes the *Dusty In New York* CD, but make that No.11. If you want a one-stop shop box set you can't beat Mercury's 2011 collection *The Magic Of Dusty Springfield*, which includes performances from her '60s TV shows plus '70s guest slots on Pebble Mill and The Morecambe & Wise Show, plus three CDs covering hits, rarities and soundtrack work. Book-wise, you would be advised to get both Lucy O'Brien's 1989 biog, Dusty, and Penny Valentine's authorised 2001 tome Dancing With Demons for the full tempestuous picture of triumph and heartbreak. If you can afford it, also try and track down Real Gone Music's masterful 2015 recreation of the *Faithful* LP.

A Glittering career: Simple Minds' (from left) Derek Forbes, Brian McGee, Mick MacNeil, Charlie Burchill and Jim Kerr in 1981.

Peter Noble/Getty

Urban legends

Tower blocks, art rock and the temptations of stadium-filling Big Music: Simple Minds re-examined. By **Tom Doyle**.

Themes For Great Cities – A New History Of Simple Minds

★★★★

Graeme Thomson

CONSTABLE. £20

NOVEMBER 1982 and Simple Minds are performing on Channel 4's live-to-air Friday teatime music show, The Tube. In a four-song set, the standout being the unrelenting Neu! groove and fast-fingered synth shapes of New Gold Dream (81-82-83-84) – the title track of their fifth album released two months before – they come across as a mysterious and faultlessly cool, post-punk-meets-Krautrock outfit. As the decade will progress, however, and as their sound turns to straighter-edged Big Music rock designed to fill arenas and stadiums, their magic and mystery will slowly evaporate.

In this 345-page, band-endorsed biography, author Graeme Thomson states that while he doesn't want to use their "young brilliance as a stick with which to beat them", his mission here is to "remystify" Simple Minds. It's a wholly successful endeavour and a speedy tale, both in terms of the intoxicants that the band used to fuel the all-night jam sessions that were the crucible of their music, and the white-knuckle pace of their rise from working-class Scots living in Glasgow tower blocks to the stage at Top Of The Pops.

Thomson's enthusiasm for tracing the cultural and geographical roots of Simple Minds is infectious, and the result shines a bright light into the forgotten corners of the band's story. Singer Jim Kerr and guitarist Charlie Burchill begin as art-headed teenagers, in thrall to Can and Roxy Music, discovering European experimental theatre in the Gorbals and, in their first band, Biba-Rom!, playing The Velvet Underground's Heroin at a children's party held in the local social club.

> "Ultimately, it's the story of the singer and guitarist's enduring friendship."

Their great epiphany comes ahead of a 1977 gig by their punk troupe Johnny & The Self Abusers at a "heavy" Glaswegian disco called Terminal 1 – where some club-goers would smuggle in ice skates to use as weapons – when the DJ plays the 12-inch of Donna Summer's I Feel Love. Kerr and Burchill are instantly struck by the realisation that synths are the future, propelling them through their first five, brilliantly inventive albums made between '79 and '82.

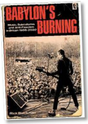
Themes For Great Cities offers a deep analytical dive into those records, and beyond (to the wrongheaded Celtic folk vibes of 1989's *Street Fighting Years*), while following a group who went from performing Bowie covers in '76 to singing backing vocals alongside him on an Iggy Pop LP in '79, or writing commercial breakthrough *New Gold Dream*… on a pig farm in Fife while spaced-out on magic mushrooms.

Fan testimonies from the likes of James Dean Bradfield and Bobby Gillespie ("They did wonders," the latter enthuses) punctuate the narrative. But, overall, it's a tale of a band finding themselves, losing their way and falling apart, before Burchill and Kerr rediscover their young brilliance via 2012's 5X5 tour performing their early albums, which in turn sparks the creative renaissance of their most recent work.

Ultimately, though, it's the story of Simple Minds' singer and guitarist's enduring, decades-long friendship. Kerr remembers the pair, wide-eyed, hitch-hiking through Europe together in 1976, at the beginning of their long voyage of discovery. "Charlie and I still refer to that trip," he tells Thomson. "We say we're still on it."

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- One early Simple Minds song, The Cocteau Twins, provided band name inspiration for Elizabeth Fraser and Robin Guthrie when they saw the band perform it at a show in their Grangemouth hometown in 1978.
- Magazine may have provided the early prototype for Simple Minds, but Jim Kerr doesn't have great memories of the two bands touring together in '79: "They never spoke to us once. Cunts."
- Bono acknowledges the influence of *New Gold Dream* on the sound of *The Unforgettable Fire*. Thomson argues it goes further, citing the U2 singer's pose on the cover of their 1983 live album, *Under A Blood Red Sky*, as being "coiled and catlike…every inch Jim Kerr in stencil".



Babylon's Burning: Music, Subcultures And Anti-Fascism In Britain 1958-2020

★★★★

Rick Blackman

BOOKMARKS PUBLICATIONS. £10

Unflinching study of fascism and cultural resistance.

Rick Blackman's 2017 essay Forty Miles Of Bad Road placed a necessary spotlight on The Stars Campaign For Interracial Friendship, an unsung collective of mainly jazz musicians, including Cleo Laine. They came together in the aftermath of the 1958 Notting Hill riots to use their music as a weapon in the struggle against racism propagated by Oswald Mosley's Union Movement and the White Defence League. Blackman returns to the subject again in Babylon's Burning, his judicial analysis of music, subculture and political activism, that brings the debate up to date. Through Rock Against Racism, Red Wedge, Love Music Hate Racism and beyond, Blackman chronicles the British socio-political climate and music's response to it. While the toxic bile never ceases, whether it's the NF, BNP or Tommy Robinson, Blackman's conclusion is positive. "The racism still exists," he writes, "but so does the fight against it."

Lois Wilson

Citizen Cash: The Political Life And Times Of Johnny Cash

★★★

Michael Stewart Foley

BASIC BOOKS. £25

A different Johnny Cash, away from the drugs and conflicts.

For many, Johnny Cash being a political figure is such a given that it's barely considered. His politics weren't about left or right, but right and wrong, or as he sang covering Nick Cave's The Mercy Seat, "all things either good or ungood". Historian Michael Stewart Foley traces what he calls Cash's "politics of empathy", from the family's sharecropping Depression days in the co-operative settlement of Dyess, Arkansas, through his civil rights concept albums to his message-strewn weekly TV show in the '70s. What comes across most is that Cash's seemingly contradictory views – supporting both Nixon's Vietnam policy and the anti-war protestors – were always in line with a man who first discovered the world through a lens of poverty and being a thankful, rather than fearful, Christian. The book, like the man in black himself, is complicated, nuanced and sometimes at odds with itself, but its heart is very much in the right place.

Andy Fyfe

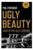
Ugly Beauty: Jazz In The 21st Century

★★★★

Phil Freeman

ZERO BOOKS. £16.99

Burning Ambulance co-founder grapples with jazz's new generation.



Taking Kamasi Washington's 2015 triple album *The Epic* as a tipping point (when "the universe decided to care"), Freeman thematically rounds up jazz's new movers and shakers and examines what makes them tick. From the gnarly question of what jazz is now, to its social and political concerns, Freeman is as free-thinking as his fast-moving subjects: crisply navigating the blurred lines between composition and inspiration, the art of unlearning classical training and examining what goes on in the editing suite. A chapter on the hip-hop influence at play within highly individual trumpeters such as Ambrose Akinmusire, Theo Croker and Marquis Hill is particularly insightful, drawing a line back to Roy Hargrove's unsung late '90s interventions. Far from a jazz snob, Freeman confidently unites the many diverse strands at play, while offering up handy, if bankrupting, lists of essential listening.

Andy Cowan

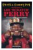
People Funny Boy: The Genius Of Lee 'Scratch' Perry

★★★★

David Katz

WHITE RABBIT. £25

Definitive Scratch biog, updated and expanded.



Since his passing last August, there has been an explosion of Lee 'Scratch' Perry tributes, though none go deeper than reggae historian and MOJO contributor David Katz's People Funny Boy, originally published in 2000. Now with added chapters and a heartfelt foreword by Linton Kwesi Johnson, Katz maps out in forensic detail Scratch's singular trajectory. From Jamaican country boy to Studio One engineer, mentor/producer to Bob Marley, roots/dub visionary at the storied Black Ark, right up to his later, peripatetic years as an eccentric walking work of art, it's all here. A fascinating and occasionally hilarious story (eg. "Could Perry really have destroyed his studio because someone took a child's rubber ball from it?"), Katz paints a compelling portrait of a complex, unique cosmic traveller the like of which we will never see again.

Simon McEwen

Saved By A Song: The Art And Healing Power Of Songwriting

★★★★

Mary Gauthier

ST MARTIN'S PRESS. £21.99

Award-winning Americana artist's unique approach to memoir.

In this eloquent, honest book, singer-songwriter Gauthier tells her life story through 13 chapters, each related to a song. Songs can change the world and save your life, she writes, and hers was in serious need of both. Most of the songs are her own, plus some that saw through her like an X-ray. John Lennon's Mother for one; Gauthier's mother abandoned her as a baby. In a particularly poignant passage, she visits the Catholic home for unmarried girls where she was born and left for adoption. Other songs send her back to times spent in jail or rehab for addictions, from alcohol to sex. "Music is a repair shop," Gauthier quotes Springsteen. In recent years she's become a repairer herself, co-writing with traumatised soldiers to help them express the inexpressible in song. As for the "Art" of songwriting, the main lesson is to "write real ones. While my songs will likely not be hits, they feed me in ways money cannot."

Sylvie Simmons

Fear Stalks The Land!: A Commonplace Book

★★★★

Kid A Mnesia: A Book Of Radiohead Artwork

★★★★

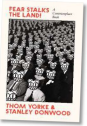
Thom Yorke & Stanley Donwood

CANONGATE. £9.99/£30

Radiohead brainbox and house-illustrator wrap up the end of days in two books.

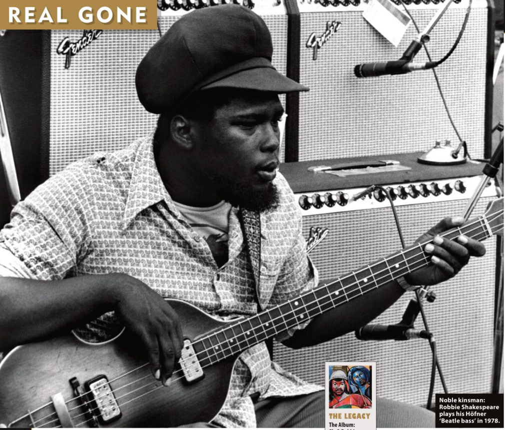
Are you sitting uncomfortably? Then fellow Exeter graduates Thom Yorke and Radiohead artist-in-residence Stanley Donwood offer succour to souls still brave enough to watch the news. It's a "two-for" offer: Fear Stalks The Land!: A Commonplace Book is the size of Chairman Mao's breast pocket and offers a fist of worrywart poetry ("Waterfalls of meltwater… I coughed these icebergs"), while Donwood colours in the apocalypse to the brusque repetition of Yorke's spidery lyrics (see: appendix). The tome's sarcastic wisps of marginalia bring us down to earth: "Let me tell your fortune: dead by 33." Yorke clearly revels in his notion of "scribbling towards Nirvana", while Donwood oozes prole art in Kid A Mnesia: A Book Of Radiohead Artwork, his own stunning pictures at a half-brick atrocity exhibition. Browsable, beautifully Technicolored horror and no cheap "four-colour litho" for Donwood, who serves yet more sinister teddies on high-gloss plates. Climate activists and art-school boppers might join hands and appreciate the view as the art goes down. You'd better be ready.

Andrew Collins



All that jazz: Kamasi Washington's *The Epic* is cited as a tipping point in Ugly Beauty.

Getty



Noble kinsman: Robbie Shakespeare plays his Höfner 'Beatle bass' in 1978.

The Rhythm Killer

Jamaican bass supremo **Robbie Shakespeare** left us on December 8.

REGGAE'S DEFINITIVE bassist, Robbie Shakespeare's brawny, melodic and spacious basslines evidenced a broad and effortless grasp of musical styles. Over a career spanning more than 40 years, he and 'Riddim Twins' drum partner Sly Dunbar would back every Jamaican star of note, bring Grace Jones to mainstream success, and be called on by stars including Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger, Jackson Browne, Serge Gainsbourg, Joe Cocker and Ian Dury.

"If an artist is a singer, an instrumentalist, or whatever, we're going to play the music to match that specific sound," Shakespeare told me in 2005. "We weren't just listening to one type of music, we were listening to James Brown, Marty Robbins, Diana Ross, a little rock'n'roll…"

Born on September 27 1953, and raised in the down-at-heel district of Vineyard Town in east Kingston, Shakespeare taught himself to play acoustic guitar after his brother joined the Emotions harmony group, who rehearsed at the family home. Future Wailers bassist Aston 'Family Man' Barrett joined them and duly mentored Shakespeare, even giving him a Höfner 'Beatle bass'. Shakespeare put it to good use on his debut recording, backing Errol Dunkley's languid adaptation of The Emotions' I'll Be Back in 1972.

Shakespeare went on to play bass on The Wailers' Concrete Jungle (also 1972) and Burning Spear's Marcus Garvey (1975). By then, he and Dunbar had met while playing rival clubs on Kingston's Red Hills Road, becoming better acquainted at studios including Channel One, and when playing sessions for Bunny Lee in the Aggrovators band. The two would bond as the rhythmic anchor of Peter Tosh's touring band in 1976. As producers, they helmed two LPs for Tosh's New Jersey-born backing singer Gwen Guthrie in the early '80s; other co-productions included hits on their Taxi label with Gregory Isaacs, Dennis Brown and Ini Kamoze, and the blending of reggae, funk and disco which began with Grace Jones' breakthrough *Nightclubbing* in 1981. Sly & Robbie also helped Black Uhuru to score the first reggae Grammy with 1984's *Anthem*, having worked closely with the group since the late 1970s. In 1987, they scored a UK Top 20 single as a duo with the mutoid Boops (Here To Go).

> "He was a man definitely not to be trifled with."

A hulking figure with a forceful personality, Shakespeare was a man definitely not to be trifled with. Unfazed by working with rock icons, he famously locked horns with James Brown on a Compass Point project that remains unreleased.

In later years he was plagued by serious health issues, including debilitating diabetes. Yet, where music was concerned, Shakespeare played until the end, and continued to innovate: his later projects including an ambient collaboration with trip-hop producer Howie B, a reggae covers set with Sinéad O'Connor, and an acclaimed jazz-dub hybrid with Norwegian trumpeter Nils Petter Molvær.

Among those paying tribute after his death on December 8 were The Rolling Stones, Dennis Bovell, David Rodigan and Dunbar, who wrote: "I am devastated by the loss of my friend and partner. The world has lost a great and talented musician."

David Katz

THE LEGACY

The Album:
Sly & Robbie
A Dub Experience
(ISLAND, 1985)

The Sound:
Featuring dubs of Black Uhuru's Chill Out, The Tamlins' version of Randy Newman's Baltimore and more, this set fully emphasises the cruciality of Robbie's bass. The jazz, funk, and rock elements underpinning his lines are revealed with subtle pauses, grooving neck slides and forceful chorded notes, with drummer Dunbar his symbiotic other half.

© Adrian Boot/Urbanimage.tv

Joe Simon
R&B hitmaker
BORN 1936

Born in Simmesport, Louisiana, as a youth Joe Simon sang in his father's church. An admirer of the Sam Cooke-era Soul Stirrers, he joined the Golden West Gospel Singers after a move to Los Angeles (this involved, he recalled, sleeping and writing in a chicken coop for two years). Simon went solo in 1960, and by the middle of the decade his strong, soulful tones were heard on secular R&B chart entries including Teenager's Prayer, (You Keep Me) Hangin' On and 1969's Grammy-winning, country-soul number one The Chokin' Kind, also a Number 13 pop hit (in '67 Simon was also one of the pallbearers at Otis Redding's funeral). In the early '70s he teamed up with Gamble and Huff, continuing his run of hits with Drowning In The Sea Of Love and Power Of Love, another R&B chart-topper. As well as his US success – Get Down Get Down (Get On The Dance Floor) went Top 10 in 1975 – in 1973 he reached Number 14 in the UK with Step By Step. In the '80s he dramatically returned to the church and became an evangelical preacher, but continued to sing, with 1998's *This Story Must Be Told* featuring a medley of sanctified songs sung years previously by The Soul Stirrers.

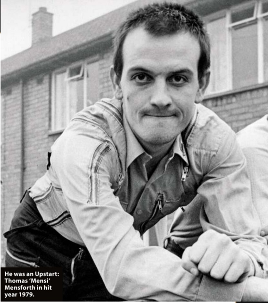
Ian Harrison

Powered by love: hit-maker-turned-preacher Joe Simon in London in the late '60s.

Richard Cole
The hammer of the gods
BORN 1946

Led Zeppelin's former tour manager often embodied the worst excesses of '70s rock, but enjoyed a clean and sober second act. Born in Kensal Rise, Cole was a scaffolder before finding work driving Concrete And Clay hitmakers Unit 4 + 2 and The Who in 1965 and '66. But it was his 12-year stint as Led Zeppelin's tour manager which cemented his reputation. Cole, nicknamed 'Ricardo' and 'Dirty Dick' by his charges, was uncompromising and sometimes violent in their defence, and was eventually fired by Zeppelin's manager Peter Grant for heroin addiction. In 1992, Cole co-authored Stairway To Heaven, the best-selling Zeppelin exposé/biography, which detailed his misdemeanours with eye-watering candour. But over 35 years of sobriety led to further work as a tour manager (for Black Sabbath and ex-Runaway Lita Ford) and a rapprochement with Zeppelin's Jimmy Page and Robert Plant. Cole died of cancer in hospital on December 2.

Mark Blake



He was an Upstart: Thomas 'Mensi' Mensforth in hit year 1979.

Thomas 'Mensi' Mensforth
Angelic Upstarts singer, left-wing agitator
BORN 1956

A South Shields coal miner before a Damascene conversion to punk after witnessing The Clash on the White Riot tour, Mensi was the Oi! movement's socialist firebrand and voice of compassion. His lyrics boldly confronted injustice and inequality, the group's first single, 1978's The Murder Of Liddle Towers, turning the death in police custody of a local boxing coach into a cause célèbre. Signing to Warners the following year, the Upstarts hit the Top 40 with the ripping I'm An Upstart and Teenage Warning, though even after the spotlight faded Mensi was still making his political presence felt, devoting a Channel 4 Play At Home documentary in 1983 to the decline of Tyneside shipbuilding. He continued fronting the group until his death from Covid-19 on December 10. "I can't sing to save my life," he once said, "but I have pride and passion."

Pat Gilbert

> "I can't sing to save my life, but I have pride and passion."
> THOMAS 'MENSI' MENSFORTH

Alvin Lucier
Sonic truth teller
BORN 1931

Renowned for experimental pieces that explored the physical properties of sound itself, Alvin Augustus Lucier Jr. spent his working life occupying the liminal space between art and physics. Raised in Nashua, New Hampshire, Lucier was educated at Yale and Brandeis Universities, later studying with Aaron Copland before winning a Fulbright Fellowship to Rome in 1960. There, his conservatoire grounding was upended by exposure to the aleatory, electronic experiments of John Cage and David Tudor and he would go on to co-found the influential Sonic Arts Union collective, alongside Robert Ashley, Gordon Mumma and David Behrman. Lucier's *chef d'oeuvre* remains his 1969 minimalist tape piece, I Am Sitting In A Room, wherein the title is recited, captured and played back into the recording space in an endlessly imbricating, ever-blurring loop – material environment and verbal language inexorably atomised into raw sonic frequencies.

David Sheppard

Getty (3), Alamy

North-western star: the irreplaceable Janice Long (her favourite LP: the Bunnymen's *Ocean Rain*).

Janice Long

Trusted DJ, cool older sister

BORN 1955

Raised in Liverpool, as a child Janice sang with her twin siblings Keith and Jeffrey, entering talent shows with family outfit The Chegwins Of Bootle. After a spell in the cabin crew of Laker Airways, she began work as a station assistant at Radio Merseyside in 1979, and soon graduated to must-hear local music show Street Life, where she gave early exposure to Liverpool scenesters including Frankie Goes To Hollywood, China Crisis and Echo & The Bunnymen. A witty and knowledgeable music lover able to connect with the most taciturn interviewee, she was poached for Radio 1 in 1982 – the national broadcaster's second female DJ after Annie Nightingale, and the first to have her own daily show – and curated '80s independent music as engagingly as her pal and regular Top Of The Pops co-presenter John Peel. In 1988 her Radio 1 career ended, with gross unfairness, after she became pregnant. She also co-presented Live Aid, compèred the Moseley Folk Festival and was involved with short-lived Liverpool station Crash FM; her later radio berths included GLR, Radio 2 (where she gave Amy Winehouse her first airplay), BBC 6 Music and, most recently, Greatest Hits Radio and Radio Wales, where she presented her final show on December 9. After she passed away on Christmas Day following a short illness, she was remembered fondly by musicians including Elvis Costello, the Bunnymen, New Order, Morrissey, Richard Hawley, Pete Wylie and Annie Nightingale, who remembered her friend as, "a human dynamo… a true trailblazer."

Ian Harrison

Stephen Sondheim

Musical theatre colossus

BORN 1930

Mentored by Oscar Hammerstein in his youth, Stephen Sondheim took his advice to view songs as one-act plays and ran with it to Broadway, expanding and remapping the 20th-century stage musical. The Manhattan-born lyricist and composer was initially ambivalent about writing "just" words for West Side Story and Gypsy: his double-threat breakthrough came with 1962's A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum. A crossword-puzzling "mathematician by nature", Sondheim was demanding of performers and audiences – 1976's Pacific Overtures handled US-Japan relations, 1979's macabre Sweeney Todd pushed stylistic boundaries, 1984's Pulitzer-winning Sunday In The Park With George sprang from pointillism – but as Little Red Riding Hood sings in 1986's adult fairy-tale Into The Woods, "nice is different than good". Still, Send In The Clowns, from 1973's A Little Night Music, became a Sinatra-approved standard. Sondheim described his meticulous creative process in 2010: "I think the more restrictive, the freer it is… If you're locked in a room, you explore all the corners."

Victoria Segal

Ralph Tavares

Soulful sibling

BORN 1941

Of Cape Verdean ancestry, smooth tenor Ralph Tavares founded New Bedford, MA-based R&B vocal group Chubby And The Turnpikes with three of his nine brothers in 1959. After adding another brother in 1973, the quintet of Ralph, Chubby, Tiny, Butch and Pooch renamed the group Tavares and hit immediately with soft soul ballad Check It Out. Their 1974 cover of Hall & Oates' She's Gone became their first of three US R&B Number 1s, although it was with the boy-next-door disco of 1975's It Only Takes A Minute and '76's gold-seller Heaven Must Be Missing An Angel that they enjoyed mainstream success. At the invite of the Bee Gees, Tavares' cover of More Than A Woman featured on 1977's *Saturday Night Fever OST*, but after 1982's Grammy-nominated final hit A Penny For Your Thoughts, Ralph departed in 1984. He returned in 2014, remaining central to the band until his death.

Lois Wilson

Steve Bronski

Bringer of the Beat

BORN 1960

Steve 'Bronski' Forrest is one of the lesser-known forces of synth-pop, but as a co-founder of the first British 'out' all-gay pop band Bronski Beat, he made an indelible imprint on his era. Like vocalist Jimmy Somerville, Forrest had left Glasgow for the bright lights and safety-in-numbers of gay London. Their landmark debut single Smalltown Boy, a Number 3 hit in 1984, was the first in a string of politicised, personalised soulful anthems. After Somerville quit in 1985 to form The Communards, Bronski and keyboardist Larry Steinbachek recruited vocalist John Foster for January 1986's Top 3 single Hit That Perfect Beat, and its Top 20 follow-up, C'mon! C'mon!. Forrest eventually moved into production before resuscitating the band name in 2016, but a stroke left him partially immobilised, and he died in a fire in his London flat in December. "A talented and very melodic man," tweeted Somerville. "Thanks for the melody, Steve."

Martin Aston

Brush grooves: Steve Bronski, synthesist of rhythm and melody.

Shutterstock, Getty (3)

Melvin Parker

Funky Drummer

BORN 1944

A master of crackling polyrhythms, Kinston-born Parker made a vital contribution to James Brown's funk manifesto, driving the rhythm section on three of the Godfather's ground-breaking mid-1960s singles: Out Of Sight, Papa's Got A Brand New Bag and I Got You (I Feel Good). Brown, who described Parker to MOJO in 2004 as "the greatest drummer I ever had in my life", hired him after hearing him play at a club in Greenville, North Carolina, in 1962. A stint in the US army interrupted the drummer's tenure with Brown, but he rejoined in 1969, playing on the iconic *Sex Machine* album. A year later, he quit the Godfather's band over a pay dispute, joining his older saxophone-playing brother Maceo in Maceo & All The King's Men. Despite a prickly relationship with Brown, he returned to drum for him at sporadic intervals between the late '70s and early '90s.

Charles Waring

Wanda Young

Marvelettes singer

BORN 1943

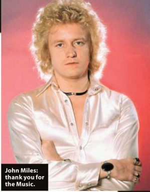
Wanda Young was in high school when singer Georgia Dobbins asked her to take her place in Detroit singers The Marvels – just in time for the group to sign to Motown, be renamed The Marvelettes and record Dobbins' co-write, Please Mr Postman. In December 1961 the single became the Motown label's first Number 1 hit. Already familiar from singing B-sides, from 1964 Young began providing lead vocals for the group's 45s, including Top 20 hits Don't Mess With Bill (1966), The Hunter Gets Captured By The Game (1967) and My Baby Must Be A Magician (1968). After they split in 1970, Smokey Robinson produced her solo LP, confusingly titled *The Return Of The Marvelettes*, which was not a success. Her voice compromised by alcohol abuse, she withdrew from music, but would reunite with bandmate Gladys Horton for the 1990 Marvelettes LP *Now!*.

Clive Prior

John Miles

Music lover

BORN 1949



John Miles: thank you for the Music.

Born John Errington in Jarrow, County Durham, singer, guitarist, pianist Miles will forever be associated with Music, the sentimental love letter to melody and harmony he recalled writing in just 30 minutes. Produced by Alan Parsons, it reached Number 3 in 1976, winning an Ivor Novello Award for Best Middle Of The Road Song. Miles started out on Tyneside playing in local bands, including The Influence with future Roxy Music drummer Paul Thompson. After going solo in 1971, 1975 45 Highfly and its Top 10 parent LP *Rebel* began his run of hits, which also included Number 10 entry Slow Down. When his popularity waned, he endured as a live act – singing Music at Belgium's annual Night Of The Proms from 1985 and, most recently, revisiting the song online with Antwerp's Symphony Orchestra during lockdown 2020. Miles also recorded and played live with Tina Turner, Jimmy Page and Joe Cocker.

Lois Wilson

THEY ALSO SERVED

GUITARIST **MARTIN WRIGHT** (below, b.1964) was born in Poynton, Cheshire. His early groups included **The Claymen** and **Uneven Valley Floors**: in 1985 he joined Manchester band **Laugh** on guitar and vocals, who hit the indie charts with John Peel selection Paul McCartney in 1987. In 1990 the band evolved into dance rockers Intastella, who scored eight singles chart entries and recorded three LPs before their split in 1997. He went on to play with **Earl Brutus** and collaborate with ex-World Of Twist enigma **Tony Ogden**. Nicknamed 'The Lad', the likeable, self-effacing Wright later managed a RSPB reserve.

ROOTS BASSIST **LEONARD 'HUB' HUBBARD** (b.1959). played with the Philadelphia neo-soul/hip-hop crew from 1992 to 2007, appearing on albums including Top 5s *Things Fall Apart* in 1999 and *The Tipping Point* (2004). He rejoined his bandmates on-stage twice more, though a legal dispute followed in 2016. His wife confirmed he had been working on new music at the time of his death.

DETROIT R&B singer **PAUL MITCHELL** (b.unknown) co-founded **The Floaters** with his ex-Detroit Emeralds brother James. They scored a massive worldwide hit with astrological smoocher Float On in 1977, recorded four albums, and had two more Top 40 US R&B hits before disbanding in 1981.

DRUMMER **BILLY CONWAY** (b.1956) joined **Mark Sandman** in Boston roots rockers **Treat Her Right** in 1985, playing a spare 'cocktail drum' set. After three LPs they split, with Sandman forming alt-blues outfit **Morphine**. Conway started playing with the band in 1993, and remained until Sandman's sudden death on-stage in Italy in 1999. He later played with **Orchestra Morphine**, the **Twinemen** and **Sleepy LaBeef**, among others.

JOURNALIST **GREG TATE** (b.1957) came to notice as a critic for The Village Voice in New York from 1987 to 2003. Open to rap among other currents of black cultural expression, he also wrote trenchant commentary for DownBeat, VIBE, Rolling Stone and the New York Times while his books included 1992's Flyboy In The Buttermilk: Essays On Contemporary America. A self-taught guitarist, his musical endeavours included co-founding the **Black Rock Coalition** and improvising ensemble **Burnt Sugar**.

SESSION BASS ACE **PHIL CHEN** (below, b.1946) grew up in Kingston, Jamaica and played guitar in '60s club bands. With **Jimmy James & The Vagabonds**, he relocated to London in the mid-'60s: in the next decade he became an established session bassist, playing with **Jeff Beck**, **Donovan** and others. In '77 he joined **Rod Stewart**'s band, bagging co-writes and playing the bassline on Da Ya Think I'm Sexy. In 1981, Chen returned to session work with **Brian May**, **Beck** and **Manzarek-Krieger**.

MOTOWN WRITER **MARILYN McLEOD** (b.1939) was best known for co-composing **Diana Ross**'s 1976 smash Love Hangover. She began writing for Berry Gordy's Jobete publishing company in the late '60s, where she met future writing partner Pam Sawyer. Notably, the pair wrote Pops, We Love You (A Tribute To Father) for Gordy's father's birthday in 1978. Motown historian Adam White notes that it has the distinction of being the only song recorded by **Smokey Robinson**, **Diana Ross**, **Stevie Wonder** and **Marvin Gaye**. The sister of Alice Coltrane and grandmother of Flying Lotus, McLeod's own album, *I Believe In Me*, was released in 2010.

SUMATRAN musician and ethnomusicologist **IRWANSYAH HARAHAP** (b.1962) fused his country's traditional music with other devotional strands as leader of the band **Suarasama**. Their delicate, trance-like sounds struck a chord with acid-folk fans as well as global music aficionados, after **Will Oldham** heard them in the 1990s on a Folkways comp of Indonesian music and encouraged his label, Drag City, to release Suarasama's debut album, *Fajar Di Atas Awan*. A second album, *Timeline*, surfaced locally in 2013; Drag City are planning a wider release in 2022.

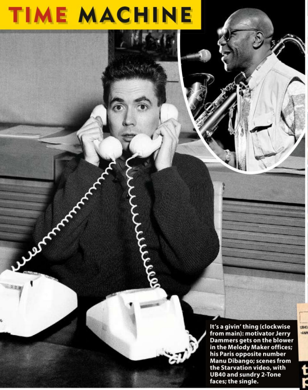
GUITARIST **TAM HARVEY** (b.1943) co-founded Glasgow folk rockers **The Humblebums** with **Billy Connolly** in 1965. After 1969's debut LP, *First Collection Of Merry Melodies*, and **Gerry Rafferty**'s accession to the group, Harvey departed. He later worked as a luthier and played the pubs of Brighton. His daughter Georgiana Mannion wrote in tribute, "He was a complicated man… he was also talented and charming."

RAPPER **KANGOL KID** (below, b.1966) danced for **Whodini** before forming Brooklyn rap crew **UTFO**, whose 1984 hit Roxanne, Roxanne spawned multiple answer records, beginning with Roxanne Shanté's Roxanne's Revenge. After a successful '80s, the group split in 1992. Kangol Kid also produced **Lisa Lisa & Cult Jam** and co-produced his management charges **Whistle**'s 1986 Number 7 UK hit (Nothing Serious) Just Buggin'. One of his signature hip-hop headwear items is displayed in the Smithsonian.

ATTORNEY **DENIS O'BRIEN** (b.1941) was introduced to **George Harrison** in 1974 by Peter Sellers. George's business manager, St Louis-born O'Brien suggested forming production company HandMade Films when Monty Python's Life Of Brian needed a last-minute backer in 1978. HandMade went on to finance films including The Long Good Friday, Time Bandits and Withnail And I. HandMade folded in 1991, and Harrison took O'Brien to court for financial mismanagement: he reportedly wrote a song called Lyin' O'Brien, which remains unreleased.

Jenny Bulley, Ian Harrison and John Mulvey

Courtesy of Angela Parker, Gordon King, Getty (4)



It's a givin' thing (clockwise from main): motivator Jerry Dammers gets on the blower in the Melody Maker offices; his Paris opposite number Manu Dibango; scenes from the Starvation video, with UB40 and sundry 2-Tone faces; the single.

FEBRUARY 1985

...2-Tone reunites for Ethiopia

FEBRUARY 26 The mid-'80s were a busy time for charity records raising funds for famine relief in Africa. Band Aid fired the starting gun at Christmas 1984. In February, with talents including Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles, Dylan and Springsteen, USA For Africa's We Are The World was awaiting release. Also ready to go was Northern Lights' Tears Are Not Enough, an all-Canadian affair with Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Gordon Lightfoot and others. In a few months Stars, the all-star metal track billed as by Hear 'n Aid, would be recorded with Ronnie James Dio, Rob Halford and Derek Smalls among the many hard rock luminaries.

On February 26's Whistle Test, on BBC2, the promo clip for a new fundraising 45 was seen. Starvation was a cover of The Pioneers' reggae song from 1970, played by a 2-Tone supergroup featuring members of The Specials, Madness and The Beat, plus spiritual brethren UB40, percussionist Gaspar Lawal, trumpet player Dick Cuthell, trombonist Annie Whitehead, vocalists Afrodiziak and The Pioneers themselves.

The story began, recalled Madness drummer Dan Woodgate, when a fan named Mick Tuohy came into their Liquidator studio and headquarters on Caledonian Road soon after the horrific extent of the East African famine had become widely known. "[He] suggested we cover The Pioneers' Starvation in aid of the famine appeal," said Woody. "We were already planning on doing something with some of the old 2-Tone people again, so it gave us the ideal opportunity. We thought it was a brilliant idea, so we contacted Jerry [Dammers, Specials keyboardist and strategist] and it snowballed from there."

"It has taken a while to sort out," producer/arranger Dammers told Sounds in January. "We want to make sure some of the money goes to Eritrea and the Sudan… Eritrea is fighting for its independence, though both sides are Marxist so I'm not taking sides."

The former 2-Tone alumni were also in need of succour. Since the original Specials had split in 1981, Dammers had overseen the tortuous *In The Studio* by The Special AKA, which included South African liberation anthem Nelson Mandela, a Top 10 hit in April '84. Madness, having left Stiff Records to set up their own Zarjazz imprint that year, were experiencing a personality crisis as they attempted to reconcile maturity and social consciences with their traditional role as the Max Walls of pop. Incomprehensibly for the '80s' biggest singles band, they had not appeared on the Band Aid record. Dave Wakeling and Ranking Roger, who'd split The Beat in 1983 to form General Public (initially with The Clash's Mick Jones), were also in a sensitive situation, having failed to realise their former band's commercial potential in the US. Only UB40 were still riding high.

> "The new version, it's much better than the original."
> **JACKIE ROBINSON, THE PIONEERS**

The song and its promo clip were both produced in Liquidator's basement studio. With scenes of starving people and desperation intercut with fields of wheat and plenty, it was a functional performance video bereft of embellishment, bar a glimpse of Chas Smash and Suggs from Madness capering in the background. Smash Hits was on hand to interview those taking part: UB40 singer Ali Campbell commented, "I was very nervous when Jerry asked me to do the vocal because the original version is sung in a really high key… I think I sound like Simon Le Bon." Ex-Specials guitarist Lynval Golding, who said he and Dammers had demo'd the track's arrangement in Coventry in November, said, "While working on Starvation there was a very special, warm feeling even though a lot of us had only met for the first time." Jackie

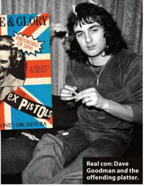
Tom Sheehan, Ray Stevenson, Getty (4), Advertising Archives

Robinson from The Pioneers – whose canon also included Specials live favourite Longshot Kick De Bucket – concluded, "I'm very pleased with the new version, it's much better than the original."

The absence of African recording stars on other Ethiopian charity discs was one oversight that Starvation sought to rectify. Its double-A side was Tam-Tam Pour L'Ethiopie, which was released as a stand-alone single in France. Recorded in December '84 in studios in Paris, it was driven by Cameroonian sax maestro Manu Dibango and featured Mory Kanté, Salif Keita, King Sunny Adé, Hugh Masekela and many more, with lyrics in Swahili, Wolof and Lingala.

The single would reach Number 33 on March 23, also proving that the consciousness-raising charity record could be of musical worth too. Later in the year, Dammers was back in the charts when he produced The Wind Of Change by Robert Wyatt With The SWAPO Singers. While promoting the single, a benefit for the campaign for Namibian independence, Dammers was asked about Starvation and its less-than-Band Aid-sized sales. "I was a little disappointed," he told Sounds. "But Starvation did raise £52,000 and that's not to be sneered at. At the time there was a lot of feeling along the lines of, 'Oh no, not another charity record'… but it was definitely worthwhile."

Ian Harrison



Real con: Dave Goodman and the offending platter.

The Swindle goes on

FEBRUARY 2 A new UK singles chart entry at Number 69 is Land Of Hope & Glory by The Ex Pistols (line-up: 'Rotten Johnny', 'Pull Cock', 'Steal Jones' and 'Posh Pen Bollocks'). Music Week swallows the line that it's a '76 Sex Pistols recording refused a release by publishers Boosey & Hawkes, but close listeners smell a rat. In time it's revealed to be a wheeze recorded in 1979 of sort-of soundalikes, possibly from Cambridge punks The Sinix, by former Pistols producer Dave Goodman. Goodman puts out other brazen soundalikes – '88's The Swindle Continues mixes tracks by both groups, while '92's Deny has Tony Barber, later of the Buzzcocks, on the sleeve – until a stern talking to from the Pistols' lawyers obliges him to desist.

Jimmy some more: (from left) Paul Rodgers, Chris Slade and the rock guitar potentate.

PAGE JOINS THE FIRM

FEBRUARY 11 *The Firm*, the debut album by the group led by Jimmy Page and Paul Rodgers from Free, is released. Page tells Sounds of the previous three years, "I was just terrified to go out and play, purely because I thought if I played badly, they'd think that was it… the media is going to knock us, period." (He also reveals he likes the Sex Pistols and Howard Jones). On February 23, debut single Radioactive peaks at UK Number 76, while the album charts at 15 in early March. The group play no Led Zeppelin or Free songs live, but closing track Midnight Moonlight is an unreleased Zeppelin track, originally titled Swan Song. The group split after 1986's *Mean Business*.

ALSO ON!

CHAIN CAPERS

3 The Jesus And Mary Chain (above) record their second John Peel Session. The previous day they played a short set in Brighton, but the Sheffield and Birmingham gigs on their current tour were cancelled due to fears of crowd violence. Single Never Understand is released on February 11.

GOODBYE, MATT

7 Matt Monro, the east London-born "Singing Bus Driver", whose hits included Born Free, On Days Like These and From Russia With Love, dies aged just 54. He had been suffering from liver cancer.

MICK GOES SOLO

19 Mick Jagger's solo LP *She's The Boss* is released. Jeff Beck, Pete Townshend and Sly & Robbie are among the personnel. "I've never listened to it all the way through," is Keith Richards' verdict.

BLUE AGAIN

22 Blue Note Records is relaunched with a gala concert at the NY Town Hall. Herbie Hancock, Art Blakey, Jack DeJohnette, Jimmy Smith and more play classics from the vaults. It's later released as *One Night With Blue Note*.

MIND SET ON LOU

23 The Velvet Underground comp *VU* peaks at UK Number 47. It collects unreleased tracks recorded in 1968 and 1969. Reflects John Cale, "I found the resurgence of interest in The Velvet Underground… fatuous."

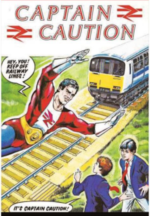
TOP TEN

UK MUSIC VIDEOS FEBRUARY 9

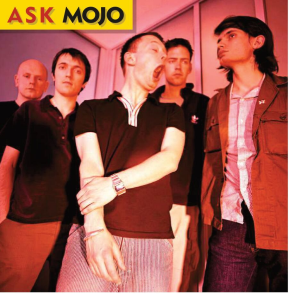
1. **THE VIDEO** WHAM! CBS/FOX
2. **THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME** LED ZEPPELIN WARNER HOME VIDEO
3. **VIDEO REWIND** THE ROLLING STONES VESTRON
4. **LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL** DAVID ESSEX POLYGRAM
5. **LA TRAVIATA** VARIOUS VIDEO SPACE
6. **SING BLUE SILVER** DURAN DURAN PMI
7. **DANCING ON THE VALENTINE** DURAN DURAN PMI
8. **THE MOVIE** ABBA MGM/UA HOME VIDEO
9. **LIVE IN CENTRAL PARK** SIMON & GARFUNKEL WARNER HOME VIDEO
10. **LABOUR OF LOVE** UB40 VIRGIN VIDEO

Thank you for The Movie: ABBA at 8.

AD ARCHIVE 1985



Captain Caution – the Marvel Cinematic Universe needs you to stop herberts flattening 1p coins on train lines (artwork by comics ace Ron Smith).



Who taped on the tourbus?

Time to sort those nagging posers, disputed facts and great unknowns.

MOJO 338's Zappa piece, which included the story of bassist Jeff Simmons quitting instead of having to record his own secretly-recorded tourbus complaints about Frank Zappa for 200 Motels, got me thinking – have any records actually been recorded on a tourbus?

Barry Prior, via e-mail

MOJO says: For years it was rumoured that parts of *Led Zeppelin II* were recorded this way, but this is now considered pre-internet excitability. From the days of analogue recording, a genuine example is from Jackson Browne's 1977 LP *Running On Empty*: narrating its moment in an impressively literal way, Nothing But Time was recorded on the way to New Jersey using a cardboard box for a drum, with the engine noise of his Silver Eagle coach clearly audible. The advent of digital recording meant that many bands got work done on the road – the guitar and vocals for Radiohead's Palo Alto, for example, were recorded during a 1997 European tour using a TASCAM recorder (Thom Yorke had earlier sung with R.E.M. on their song Be Mine, which also began life as a tourbus demo and was later released on the 25th anniversary of *New Adventures In Hi-Fi*). In 2010, Damon Albarn recorded the Gorillaz album *The Fall* using an iPad during a month-long US tour, while his drumming friend Tony Allen had worked on the road with Doctor L on the 2001 album *Psyco On Da Bus*. Other touring producers include Kendrick Lamar, Lady Gaga and Billie Eilish, who, with her brother Finneas, demo'd Bond theme No Time To Die on a coach in a Texas car park. An honorary mention should go to Oklahoma country star Toby Keith's touring-inspired *The Bus Songs*, whose 2017 single Wacky Tobaccy featured a video filmed on the singer's charabanc with Willie Nelson enjoying a smoke.

There goes the charabanc: (clockwise from left) Radiohead recorded on the move; The Cramps shared a bill with The Police?; Bill Wyman's outlandish vocals; producer extraordinaire Claire Francis.

FEMALE PRODUCERS REVISITED

Re: Where are the female producers? (Ask MOJO 338) I immediately thought of Claire Francis. Born in Brooklyn, she not only worked as a producer, but also an arranger and composer. It's been suggested as many as 50 releases bear her credit (I know of around 20) including records by The Nightriders (with Jeff Lynne), Lynn Holland, Graham Bell, Mikki Young and Sonny Childe, as well as several for ALP. The best-known of these was by The Vikings, which featured Average White Band star Alan Gorrie. Their lone 45, Bad News Feeling, was an exclusive Paul Simon song; he and Claire knew each other from New York. She also produced an unreleased album for Arthur Brown's pre-Crazy World band, the Arthur Brown Union. Francis also recorded two excellent singles – I've Got My Own Thing Going (1966) and But I Don't Care (1967). According to the singer, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and Bill Wyman feature on the former. Later, Claire would forge a new career as the author and psychic healer Claire Francis Brightwater. She died in 2018.

Brian Hogg, via e-mail

MOJO says: Thanks Brian. And also to Helen Reddington, AKA Helen McCookerybook, who points out her new tome, She's At The Controls: Sound Engineering, Production And Gender Ventriloquism In The 21st Century, is out now.

WHO PICKED THE CRAZY BILLS?

Re: Rock's weirdest bills (Ask MOJO 337). Credit where credit's due: the Roundhouse and, subsequently, the Lyceum were venues used by the promoter John Curd on Sunday nights in the '70s and early-to-mid-80s. He often had the most eclectic line-ups – Steel Pulse, The Cramps and The Police, for instance – but mainly it was an opportunity to showcase and encourage new talent. There were at least four bands on each bill – a headliner maybe drawing 1,000-1,500 people, main support pulling 300-500, third act maybe 100-200, and the lowly opener 50 at most. JC kept bringing us The Clash, Motörhead, The Specials, Burning Spear, Dead Kennedys, Depeche Mode (supporting Fad Gadget), King Sunny Adé, Einstürzende Neubauten, King Kurt, Throbbing Gristle… all for £3/£3.50 max! I was his DJ (he hated sound engineer tapes) and ran the Better Badges stall at many of these shows.

Hamish MacDonald, via e-mail

'HOGS: FULL OF WIND?

Re: unreleased LPs, Ask MOJO 337. I have a friend who insists that an unreleased Groundhogs LP exists called – seriously – *Fart*. Is this true?

Paul H, via e-mail

MOJO says: Incredibly, Sounds of September 8, 1973, reported that Tony McPhee was quitting the band ("I've been doing all the work," he protested) as soon as they'd finished an album entitled *Phart*. Instead, the next Groundhogs LP was 1974's *Solid*. Can anyone out there shed any more light?

HELP MOJO

My friend Rick Kronberg is obsessed with the Stones' *Satanic Majesties* track In Another Land, and in particular the bizarre, trippy tremolo vocal effect that Mr Wyman employs. Could we round up the names of all the other songs that've foolhardily employed that very same vocal effect?

David Gebroe, Long Beach, CA

CONTACT MOJO

Have you got a challenging musical question for the MOJO Brains Trust? E-mail **askmojo@bauermedia.co.uk** and we'll help untangle your trickiest puzzles.

Getty (3)

Take me to your louder

Win! A set of fine Esprit Titus EZ speakers from Triangle.

AWARD-WINNING French speaker brand Triangle are much praised for their strong, unique identity and products' ability to stand the test of time. The best-selling Esprit Titus EZ is no exception. At just 30cm tall and 17cm wide, the Titus EZ bookshelf speaker blends neatly with its surroundings while effortlessly filling rooms with detailed hi-fi sound, offering outstanding sonic intensity and powerful bass. The brown maple finish brings a combination of modern aesthetics with a sense of traditional craftsmanship to Triangle's most famous product range.

They retail at £900, and we have a set up for grabs for this issue's crossword prize! So dig deep and complete rock-word puzzle-riddler Michael Jones' crossword and send a scan of it to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk, making sure to type CROSSWORD 340 in the subject line. Entries without that subject line will not be considered. Please include your home address, e-mail and phone number. The closing date for entries is **March 2.** For the rules of the quiz, see www.mojo4music.com

For info see: www.trianglehifi.com and www.scvdistribution.co.uk/category/triangle

TRIANGLE
MANUFACTURE ELECTROACOUSTIQUE

ANSWERS

MOJO 338

Across: 1 Syd Barrett, 6 Sweet, 9 Bob Dylan's Dream, 12 Rob, 16 Dinosaur Jr, 17 Angie, 19 Decade, 20 She, 21 Secret Heart, 22 Talk, 24 Grass, 25 Mirror, 26 Almaz, 28 Rise, 30 Boom, 31 Eve, 33 Allen, 34 Baker, 35 Lulu, 36 Later, 38 Tom, 39 Ochs, 40 Salt, 42 Phew!, 44 Krauss, 46 Danzig, 47 Fret, 48 Evil, 49 Taste, 52 The The, 53 Hell, 54 Ferry, 56 Upton, 58 Eden, 59 Eva, 60 Ewan MacColl, 62 Tonight, 64 Cornell, 65 No Doctor No.

Down: 1 Star, 2 Debbie Harry, 3 Albion, 4 Ray Manzarek, 5 Ten, 6 Sad, 7 Eternity, 8 Tammi Terrell, 10 Across A Crowded Room, 11 Strict Machine, 13 Odds, 14 Ode To Billie Joe, 15 McAlmont, 18 Up The Junction, 23 Kim, 24 Grebo, 27 Zak, 29 In Utero, 32 Vamp, 37 Earl Hines, 41 Dusty, 43 Liberation, 44 Kit, 45 Steinman, 50 Soft Cell, 51 Blue Note, 55 Yellow, 57 Tigers, 61 Aeon, 63 Troy.

Winner: Aidan Kavanagh of **Ashton-under-Lyne** wins a Cambridge Audio Evo 75 all-in-one music player.

Getty (3)

ACROSS

1 See photoclue A (3,6)
5 The Z of ZTT Records (4)
8 Second album by the Jackson 5 (1.1.1.)
10 "Introducing acoustic guitar, plus…" (7,5)
13 Cold hard track from Gary Numan's *The Pleasure Principle* (5)
15 Robert Johnson's genre of music (5,5)
18 Horace Wimp's missing 24 hours? (8)
19 Subject of a 2021 Edgar Wright film (6)
21 Pixies' six if man is five (3,5)
22 Yorkston and Thorne's collaborator (4)
23 Prince's cheeky message to his label (5)
24 Paul McCartney song from *Driving Rain* that Abba did five times (1,2)
25 Brothers Scott and Seth (5)
26 He was born Paul Arthurs (8)
28 Soul singer Washington (4)
31 A long way for Regina Spektor (3)
33 She might be Germano or Gerrard (4)
34 *The Space ------ Alive* (Hawkwind LP) (6)
35 Dave, Fairport Convention's bassist (4)
36 The beautiful sound of Neil Diamond (5)
37 "Make it magnificent" (Blondie) (6)
38 Scott, producer on six R.E.M. LPs (4)
40 ----- *Secrets* (Santana album) (5)
41 Cole, or possibly Cher (5)
42 ------- *For Plague Lovers* (Manics LP) (7)
43 What is public for Chuck D and Flavor Flav (5)
47 It links Elastica and the Stones (10)
49 Wild ------, band behind Two Dancers (6)
52 It might be McGarrigle or Meredith (4)
55 Hardin, who wished he were a carpenter (3)
56 U2 hit subtitled In The Name Of Love (5)
57 A way for Stan to leave his lover, according to Paul Simon (4,1,3,4)
58 Rochford from Polar Bear (3)
60 --- Speedwagon (1.1.1.)
62 Rapper who released *Illmatic* (3)
63 Country singer Gosdin and brother of Rex who worked with Gene Clark (4)
64 Composer Bernstein, who scored The Magnificent Seven (5)
65 First name of ELP's Lake (4)
66 Their third LP was *Reign In Blood* (6)

DOWN

1 Canterbury scene classic from Caravan (2,3,4,2,4,3,4)
2 First Bruce Springsteen album not to feature the E Street Band (8)
3 Rock record label or a Jonathan Richman song (10)
4 Who's gotta be Del Shannon's? (3)
6 A Bowie film and a Bowie track (8,9)
7 Band whose most recent album is last year's *No Gods No Masters* (7)
9 Inspiration for songs by Leonard Cohen, Jefferson Airplane and Graham Nash (7,5)
11 Harold, composer and collaborator of Brian Eno and Robin Guthrie (4)
12 Cat Stevens single from the album *Mona Bone Jakon* (4,11)
14 The ---, John Power's band before Cast (3)
16 See photoclue B (5,6)
17 Wheeler & Hamilton & McMurray (& Charlotte Hatherley sometimes) (3)
20 ---- *In My Heart* (Otis Redding LP) (4)
23 Her follow-up to *Masseduction* was last year's *Daddy's Home* (2,7)
27 Tom Rush song covered by the Walker Brothers (2,7)
29 Could be Bright, Sexy or Swastika (4)
30 Trio who made Sunshine Of Your Love (5)
32 Echo & The Bunnymen's first LP (10)
39 At The Chime Of A City ----- (Nick Drake) (5)
44 Siouxsie's solo record (8)
45 "And all you create, and all you destroy" (Pink Floyd) (7)
46 Link between Weller and Vedder (3)
48 The Cure's was wrong on *Galore* (6)
49 See photoclue C (1.1.4)
50 Much-sampled cover by The Incredible Bongo Band (6)
51 ----- Of The Sea, psychedelic rock act (5)
53 How many feet underground on 1 Down? (4)
54 What Screamin' Jay Hawkins has put on you (5)
59 --- Of The War (Jeff Wayne) (3)
61 Skip Spence's 1969 solo masterpiece (3)

Trad seeds: early Steeleye (from left) Maddy Prior, Peter Knight, Ashley Hutchings, Tim Hart and Martin Carthy; (inset) the Gay and Terry Woods line-up's *Hark! The Village Wait*.

Maddy Prior and Steeleye Span

They began at the dawn of British folk rock, but had to split to get some rest from the road.

HELLO LATE 1969

Tim Hart [voice, stringed instruments] and I had a small flat in Archway, in a house with about four flats in it. I was very into the olde worlde thing, everything was polished wood. I think three of the flats were actually rented by folk people, it was a sort of a community.

The first day of the group would be the dinner we had there with Ashley Hutchings [bass] and [folk rock married couple] Gay and Terry Woods, when they said, "Do you want to join the band?" At the time, there was a lot of talk about folk going electric, but basically nobody could afford it, and we didn't know how to do it anyway. But Ashley had been in Fairport Convention and had access to record companies and things, so he was in a position to do it.

So the next day we went to Ashley's house in Muswell Hill and rehearsed songs that we liked – Terry and Gay would have done Dark-Eyed Sailor, we'd have done something like Copshawholme Fair, possibly – and we decided it would work. We knew it was going to be a band. I don't know that we had any amplification at that point, but we got some later.

We went to a house in Wiltshire, to get it together in the country – I would advise groups never to do that, to get to know each other, because apart from the music there was nothing else for us to do. Gay and Terry left before we'd finished the album [*Hark! The Village Wait*, recorded in London in March 1970], and we were wondering what was going to happen, a bit. Then Tim asked [guitarist] Martin Carthy if he was interested, and he was, so it started off again. Martin had actually suggested the name of the band way beforehand, at Tim's family home in St Albans – Steeleye Span is a character in a song [Horkstow Grange] – and we had a vote on it. What a fantastic name. It was exciting, but, you know, everything was exciting then.

We did two more albums with Martin and Ashley, and then Rick [Kemp] and Bob [Johnson] came in, and that became the band most people are aware of. The folk world, I think, still holds those first three albums as being Steeleye Span, but, you know, you can't do the same thing for ever.

GOODBYE MARCH 12 1978

It had run its course for us, at that point. We had an album contract of two albums a year, for five years – we'd worked flat out since 1969. We never took time off, we were always rehearsing, recording, touring, and, in the end, we were just exhausted, and fed up with each other, and wanted to do other things – I was working on a solo album [*Woman In The Wings*], so I was sort of working towards that as well. These days you'd take a year off, but then it was kind of, if you did that the public would forget you, which obviously, patently, isn't true. So because we *couldn't* stop, the only way to stop, was to really *stop*. So we broke up.

"I have to say, I do like farewell tours."
MADDY PRIOR

Martin and John [Kirkpatrick, accordion] had come back to help us finish off work we had to do [the *Storm Force Ten* LP was released in November 1977], and we had a 40-date farewell tour – I have to say, I do like farewell tours, they're really good – which I think finished in London [actually the Ipswich Gaumont]. It was a strange tour, but I mean, the band's always been a bit weird, we've always made strange decisions. It was emotional, yeah. I would have been a bit sad for sure, but I was a very nervous performer and didn't have any spare energy for anything else. I was in a bit of a cloud of my own anyway.

We realised quite soon that we actually kind of missed it, and, of course, it was completely different when we came together again [for 1980's *Sails Of Silver*]. It's continued, into its different phases. The material is the strength of it – using traditional stories and music to form something in a rock direction, that's kind of been our thing, a strange little corner to go into, but it's worked for us. Back then, the idea of somebody being in the band for 50 years was inconceivable, but Steeleye is kind of the bedrock, and I've been very happy with that.

As told to Ian Harrison

The 50th Anniversary Tour – The Continuation begins in May.

Fare thee well: the '78 line-up, ready to stop; (left) Maddy today.

Getty (3)

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